HOLIDAY TALES

by Hyman E. Goldin

Holiday Tales

By HYMAN E. GOLDIN

For many centuries the Jewish festivals have served as a symbol of hope to the millions of dispersed Jews. The historic events upon which the festivals are based, linked the Jews to their great past, and served as a promise of hope that some day they would again build a homeland on the sacred soil of Palestine.

Now that the Jews have gained their homeland, the ideals symbolized by our Sabbath and festivals are no longer merely tokens of hope, but an actual part of our national existence. The rebirth of Israel has given deeper meaning and significance to our festivals.

The great importance of having the Jewish youth become acquainted with the Jewish festivals, cannot be overstressed. Our Sabbath and our festivals form the very basis of our national existence.

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JEWISH HOLIDAYS AND THEIR LEGENDS

BY

HYMAN E. GOLDIN

AUTHOR OF

"MISHNAH", "THE BOOK OF LEGENDS",

"THREE KINGS", ETC.

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SABBATH

SABBATH

"Six days thou shalt work, and on the seventh day thou shalt rest." (Exod. xiii, 12).

1. *The Holiness of Sabbath*

OD said to Moses: "I have a precious gift in My treasures, a rare gem called Sabbath, which I desire to present to Israel. Go and notify them of My message to thee."

On returning home from the synagogue Friday eve, every man is escorted by two ministering angels; one of them is a good angel, and the other one is an evil angel. If upon entering the house with the host, they find that the candles are radiating their lights, and the table is prepared and set in honor of the Sabbath, the good angel says: "May it be thus the next Sabbath." The evil angel, against his will, responds "Amen" to the blessing. When they find that no preparations were made in honor of the Sabbath, the evil angel says: "May it be thus the next Sabbath," and the good angel, against his will, responds "Amen" to this curse.

2. *Johanan ben Torta*

Once there lived a saintly man who possessed a cow with which he used to plow his field. One day the saintly man became poor, and he was compelled to sell his only cow to a non-Jew. For six days the new master plowed with the cow in his field and found her obedient. But when Sabbath came she became disobedient; she crouched under her yoke and would not stir. Enraged at such disobedience, her new owner beat her, but the cow remained crouching, without stirring.

The non-Jew ran to the saintly man and exclaimed excitedly: "Come, take your cow back. For six days she did all manner of work for me, but today she refuses to obey me. She lay down beneath her yoke and refuses to stir although I beat her."

"The poor animal is not accustomed to do any work on the Sabbath," thought the saintly man. "Come with me," said he to the non-Jew, "and I will make her get up and obey your orders."

When they reached the field, the saintly man bent down and whispered into the ear of the cow: "Cow, cow, until now you belonged to me, and you had to rest on the Sabbath; but since, because of my sins, I had to sell you to some one else, I pray you, rise and do the will of your new master."

Immediately the cow got up and was ready to do the bidding of her master.

"O pray tell me," said the non-Jew in great astonishment, "what did you whisper into the ear of this cow? Maybe you enchanted her."

The saintly man then told the owner of the cow what he had whispered to her. The non-Jew became greatly alarmed, and said: "If this animal who possesses neither the power of speech nor knowledge was obedient to her Creator, how much more should I be obedient to my Creator who gave me knowledge and understanding."

The non-Jew then went and accepted Judaism as his religion, and thereafter when he acquired much wisdom, he was known as Rabbi Johanan ben Torta.

3. *Joseph, the Honorer of Sabbaths*

Once there lived a poor man, Joseph by name, who was known to the people as "The Honorer of Sabbaths." He was so called because he used to live in poverty all week, and save all he earned during the week to spend it for good food in honor of the Sabbath.

This Joseph had a non-Jewish neighbor, who was extremely wealthty. One day fortune-tellers came to the non-Jew and told him that all his wealth would one day become the property of his Jewish neighbor Joseph. So the non-Jew immediately sold all his property, and with the money he realized he bought for himself a very precious gem which he safely sewed in his turban.

"Now," said he, "my poor neighbor can never obtain my wealth."

Once, as the non-Jew was crossing a bridge, a strong gust of wind carried his turban from his head and it fell into the stream below and sank. "At least I am now sure that my wealth will not fall into the hands of the Jew," the loser of the precious gem comforted himself.

After some time the precious gem became loosened from the turban and was swallowed by a fish. This fish was afterward caught in the net of some fishermen who brought it to town on a Friday late in the afternoon. "Who will buy this beautiful fish from us at this time of the day?" inquired the fishermen from the townspeople.

"Go to the house of Joseph, the honorer of Sabbath," the fishermen were told, "for he never refuses to buy anything offered to him on Friday with which he can honor the Sabbath."

Accordingly, the fishermen went and offered the fish to Joseph who bought it from them. On cutting the fish open, the pious man found the wonderful gem, which he thereafter sold for a very huge sum of money.

Later on Joseph was met by an old man who said: "Him who lends to the Sabbath, by incurring an additional expense in honoring the Sabbath, the Sabbath will repay."

4. *Sabbath Pleads*

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate of the tree of knowledge. As a punishment, God commanded the angels to turn Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden at the twilight of the Sabbath eve. God also ordained that the heavenly light, by which Adam could survey the world from end to end, should disappear.

Then Sabbath came, presented itself before God, and pleaded: "Lord God of heaven and earth! Thou hast created the world in six days, and during these working days, Thou didst not punish any creature. Now, when the seventh day has come, which was blessed and sanctified by Thee above all other days, Thou dost intend to punish Adam. O Lord, have mercy upon the man and permit him to remain here this Sabbath day."

God hearkened to the plea of the Sabbath, and He permitted Adam and Eve to remain in the garden on this holy day. When the end of the holy day was drawing nigh, and the sun was about to set, God expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden.

5. *R. Akiba and Anius Rufus*

T. Anius Rufus, a Roman commander under the emperor Hadrian, once said to R. Akiba: "Why do you honor the Sabbath more than any other day?"

"Pray tell me," said R. Akiba, "why are you better than any other man that you deserve all these honors?"

"Because my emperor saw fit to honor me above others," replied Rufus.

"Then the Supreme King of kings saw fit to honor this particular day above the others," stated R. Akiba.

"But how can you tell that this particular day is the one chosen by your God?" asked Rufus.

"Let the river Sambation prove that the seventh day is the Sabbath," said R. Akiba; "for during all the days of the week, it throws up stones, but on Saturday it rests."

"You bring me evidence which cannot be proven," said Rufus.

"Let the one who divines by ghosts prove that the seventh day is the Sabbath," said R. Akiba. "For every day in the week he is able to divine by ghosts, but on the seventh day, he is unable to do so. And, if this is not sufficient proof for you, let your father's grave prove that the seventh day is Sabbath. Every day in the week, his grave emits a smoke, but on the seventh it does not emit any smoke."

Rufus then tried to bring up the ghost of his father on the seventh day, but he did not succeed. He then tried to bring it up on a weekday, and he succeeded. Rufus asked his father: "Why did

you refuse to come up on the Jewish Sabbath? Did you become a Jew after your death?"

"With you on earth one is required to observe the Sabbath," replied the ghost of Rufus' father, "but if one chooses not to observe it, he is at liberty to do so. But with us, in the other world, one is forced to observe the Sabbath, whether he wills it or not."

"Why, what kind of work have you there, in the other world, on weekdays," asked Rufus, "that you speak of resting on the Sabbath?"

"On weekdays we are judged and punished," replied the ghost, "but on the Sabbath, we rest, and are let alone."

PASSOVER (PESAH)

"And in the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, is the Passover unto the Lord. And on the fifteenth day of this month shall be a feast; seven days shall unleaven bread be eaten." (Numb. xxviii, 16-18).

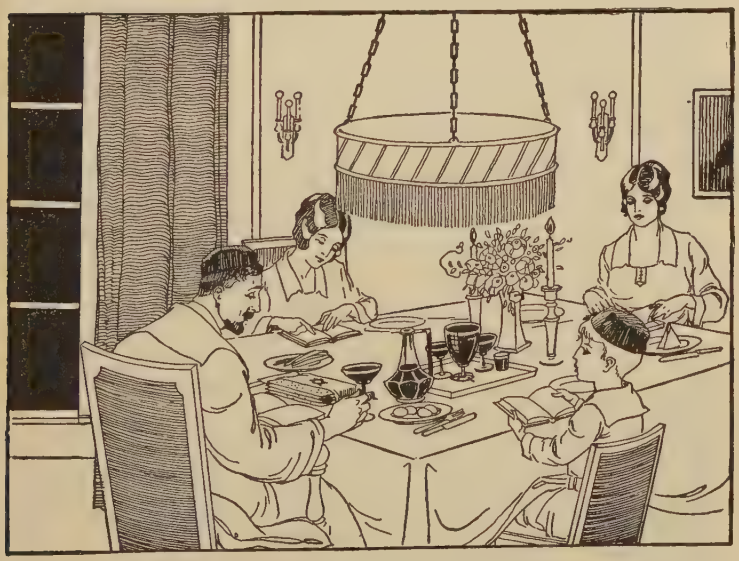
Passover is the Jewish Day of Independence, the day commemorating freedom. It is a day of rejoicing because the Jews were freed from the Egyptian bondage, in the days of Moses. It is a spring festival which fills one with hope and ambition.

This holiday is known as the Festival of Matzoth, because God commanded us to eat Matzoth, unleavened bread, during the seven days of Passover. This commemorates the fact that the Jews were urged by Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to leave in haste, and hence they had no time to have their dough leavened.

On the eve of the fourteenth day of the month of Nisan, when the house has been cleaned of all that is leaven, the Passover is ushered in by a

wonderful ceremony. This ceremony is known as the Seder. Passover lasts eight days, beginning with the fifteenth day of Nisan, and ending with the twenty-second.

This Festival is also called "Pesah" (Passover), because the Angel passed over the houses of the Jews when he appeared in Egypt to kill the first-born.



THE EGYPTIAN BONDAGE

1. *The Beginning of the Bondage*

HILE Joseph and his brothers, who settled in Egypt, were alive, the Egyptians were friendly toward the Israelites. But when the last of the brothers died, the suffering of the children of Jacob began.

The Israelites had increased in numbers. At the time of Jacob's arrival in Egypt, there were but seventy persons in the entire Jewish family, but now their numbers had grown to six hundred thousand. Their physical strength and heroism were also extraordinary. The Egyptians therefore became alarmed at the great numbers of Israelites and were filled with fear and envy. The first hostile act on the part of the Egyptians was to take away from the Israelites all fields and vineyards which Joseph had given them.

Shortly after the death of Levi, Magron, the Egyptian king who had been brought up by Joseph, died, and his son Malol ascended the throne. All the princes and elders who remembered Joseph and all the good he had done for Egypt, also died. A new generation arose who

knew not the sons of Jacob and therefore did not hesitate to oppress the Israelites.

Once Malol waged war against Zepho, the grandson of Esau. The Israelites fought on the side of the Egyptians, and through their heroism saved the Egyptians from certain defeat. The Egyptians, instead of being grateful to the Israelites for their loyalty, became more envious of them, and feared that some day the Israelites might use their wonderful strength against them.

2. *Pharaoh's Cunning*

The councillors and elders of Egypt came to Malol, who was named Pharaoh by the Egyptians, and said to him: "Behold, the children of Israel are numerous and mighty. Now then give us counsel and tell us how to get rid of them and gradually destroy them, lest they become too numerous in the land, join our enemies in time of war, and destroy us."

"This is my advice," said the king. "The cities of Pithom and Rameses (Tanis and Heliopolis) are not fortified, and we must have them strong enough to withstand the attack of the foe. Let a royal decree therefore go forth over all the lands of Egypt and Goshen that all the inhabitants, both Egyptians and Hebrews, must help build fortifications." Pharaoh himself set an example to all the people. He took trowel and basket in hand, and put a brick mould on his neck. The people

were then urged by the overseers, who had been appointed by Pharaoh, to follow the king's example. "See how the king works," they said. "Will you not imitate his activity?"

Thus the Israelites went to work, and laid the moulds upon their necks, little suspecting the guile that was in the heart of the king and his councillors.

At the close of the first day, the Hebrews had made a large number of bricks. "Now," said Pharaoh to the overseers, "this number of bricks must be imposed upon the Israelites as the amount of their daily task."

For a month the Egyptians worked together with the Hebrews; then the Egyptian workmen were gradually withdrawn from the work; but as yet the Hebrews were paid the regular wage.

When a year and four months elapsed, not an Egyptian was to be seen making bricks or building, but the Hebrews were kept at their work, and finally were given no wage for it.

When the walls around Pithom and Rameses were completed, the Israelites were employed to strengthen the fortifications of all the other cities of Egypt and to dig canals for the Nile. They were also employed to dig and plough the fields, to prune fruit-trees, and to do all sorts of menial work in the house and in the field.

Very harsh and cruel men were set over them as taskmasters and overseers, and if one of the Israel-

ites asked for his wages, or fainted under his burden, he was beaten or put in the stocks. They were kept at work from early dawn till late at night, they were not permitted to go home at night but were forced to sleep in the open air, upon the bare ground.

In spite of all the attempts made by the Egyptians to crush the spirit of the unfortunate people and to diminish their numbers, they were sustained by the hope in God. For they heard a voice from heaven, saying: "I promised their father Abraham that I would make his children as numerous as the stars in heaven, and thou, O wicked king, contrivest to prevent them from multiplying. We shall see whose word will stand, Mine or thine."

While the men of Israel slept exhausted after their unspeakable toil, their faithful women labored to relieve and strengthen them. They hastened to the springs to bring pure water for their husbands to drink, and, by the grace of the All Merciful, it so happened that their pitchers were found, each time, to contain half water and half fish.

These devoted and diligent women dressed the fish, and prepared other good meats for their husbands. They brought the food to their husbands in the field, and encouraged them with their cheerful words. This loving attention of the women soothed the hearts of the men, and gave them fresh energy.

3. *The Pious Midwives*

One hundred and twenty-five years had now elapsed from the time Jacob came to Egypt. The councillors and elders of Egypt presented themselves again before Pharaoh and complained to him that in spite of the fact that the Israelites had been reduced to slavery, they had increased and multiplied and become very mighty in the land. When the king was unable to think of a new way in which to oppress the Hebrews, he asked the councillors for their advice. Balaam the son of Beor then spoke to Pharaoh: "It was well, indeed, that the king laid heavy tasks upon the Hebrews and enslaved them; but that alone does not suffice. It is necessary that their number be diminished, so that they may not overwhelm us by sheer weight of numbers and drive us out of the land. Therefore, let the king give orders to the Hebrew nurses to kill every male child that is born to the Hebrews, but to spare the lives of all the female children."

This counsel pleased the king well. He summoned the Hebrew midwife Jochebed and her daughter Miriam, and commanded them to slay all male children, but to allow the daughters of the Hebrews to live.

Now Miriam was only five years old, nevertheless she was already of great assistance to her

mother in nursing women. Both showed the utmost kindness to the new-born children, washed them and brushed them up, said pretty things to them, and strengthened the mothers with cordials and tonic draughts. Due to the great care taken by these kind nurses, no child born under their ministration came into the world lame or blind or afflicted with any other blemish. The two women were such favorites with the people that they called one Shiphrah (the soother or beautifier) and the other Puah (the helper).

When Jochebed and Miriam heard the decree of Pharaoh, Miriam exclaimed: "Woe to the man! God will punish him for his evil deed." The executioner would have killed her for her audacity, but the mother implored for pardon, saying: "O king! forgive her speech; she is only a little foolish child."

Pharaoh consented, and assuming a gentler tone, explained that female children were to be spared, and that the male children were to be quietly put to death, without the knowledge of the mothers. "Now," said the king to them, "you hear my command, if you do not obey my wishes, you will be cast into a furnace of fire." But Jochebed and Miriam would not carry out his command. God therefore rewarded them, for of the former Moses was born, and from Miriam's union with Caleb sprang the royal house of David.

4. *A Bad Dream*

Five years passed, and one night Pharaoh dreamed that, as he sat upon the throne, an old man stood before him holding a pair of scales in his hand. The old man took all the nobles, elders and great men of Egypt, bound them together and put them on one scale of the balance. On the other scale he put a suckling kid, and the kid outweighed them all.

In the morning, when Pharaoh awoke, he called for his favorite councillors Jethro, Job and Balaam, and said: "Hearken you to my dream and tell me its meaning." Thereupon he related his dream.

Then answered Balaam, and said: "O King, may you live forever! The dream you dreamt signifies this: A child will be born among the Hebrews, who shall bring destruction to our people and to our land. He will lead the Hebrews with a strong hand out of Egypt, and before him all the nations will tremble. Take heed, therefore, for a great danger threatens you and all Egypt."

"What shall we do?" said Pharaoh in dismay. "All that we have devised against this people has failed. How then can we blot them out from the face of the earth?"

"Let the king suffer me to give him my advice," said Jethro.

"You may speak," replied the king.

"May the king's days be multiplied!" said Jethro. "This is my advice: the people that you oppress are a great people. God chose them in the days of old from amongst all the nations of the earth, and He is their shield. All who resist them are brought to destruction; all who favor them, prosper. Therefore, O king, withdraw your hand, which is very heavy upon them; lighten their tasks, and extend to them your favor."

This advice pleased neither Pharaoh nor his councillors. The king's anger was kindled against Jethro and he drove him out of his court and from the country. Then Jethro with his wife and daughters left Egypt and settled in the land of Midian.

Then said the king: "Job of Uz, give us your opinion."

But Job held his peace and said nothing.

Then rose Balaam, son of Beor, and said: "O king, all your attempts to harm Israel have failed, and the people continue to thrive. Think not to try fire against them, for that was tried against Abraham their father, and he was saved unhurt from the midst of the flames. Try not the sword against them, for the knife was raised against Isaac their father, and he was delivered by an angel of God. Nor will hard labor injure them, as has been proved, for their father Jacob was subjected by Laban to all manner of hard work, and yet he

prospered. There remains water, however, that has not yet been tried either against them or their fathers; prove them with water. Therefore my advice is to cast all their new-born sons into the Nile."

5. *The Innocent Are Saved*

Pharaoh hesitated not; he appointed Egyptian women as nurses to the Hebrew women, and instructed them to drown all the male children that were born. He threatened with death all those who would withstand his decree. The Hebrew women then began to conceal their new-born children, so that they might not be discovered by the king's officers who were sent to Goshen to search for them. The Egyptians then thought of a devilish plan. The Egyptian women were to take their little ones into the houses of the Hebrew women who were suspected of hiding their children. Now it is the habit of children that when one cries, another cries also. When, therefore, the Egyptian women went into a Hebrew house, they would prick their babes, which caused the children to cry; then the Hebrew children that were kept in hiding would also cry. Thereupon the Egyptians would bring out the Hebrew children from their hiding places, and cast them into the Nile.

As a result, the Hebrew women who were about to give birth to a child, would go out into the

field, and sit down in the shade of an apple-tree. God would then cause a deep sleep to fall upon the suffering women, who gave birth during their sleep. On awakening and finding a new-born babe, the woman, fearing the king's penalty, would abandon the child in the field and return home, exclaiming: "O most Merciful One, into Thy hands I have committed my child!" God would then send down His angels, who washed and dressed the babe, smeared his little body with ointments, and stretched his limbs. Then they put two smooth pebbles into his little hands, from one of which he sucked milk, and from the other honey. God also caused the hair of the babes to grow down to their knees and this served them as clothes to protect them from heat and cold.

But finally the officers of the king discovered this also and were about to slay all the children that were in the fields. "Open thy mouth," said God to the earth, "and protect My children!" The earth immediately opened and received the babes into a hollow place where they were sheltered until they grew up. There they were fed by angel hands with butter and honey, and they grew up strong and healthy.

The Egyptians brought oxen and ploughed the fields, in the hope of destroying thereby the vanished infants, but they were unable to do them harm. When the babies grew up, the earth would

open its mouth and vomit forth the children, who thus sprang from the soil like flowers, and walked home unperceived by the Egyptians. Thus the children of Israel increased and multiplied exceedingly.

MOSES

1. *His Birth*

KOHATH, son of Levi, had a son named Amram, who took to himself Jochebed as wife. She was one of the midwives who had risked their lives in order to save the lives of the children. To Jochebed a daughter was born who was named Miriam, "Bitterness," for it was at the time of her birth that the Egyptians began to embitter the lives of the Jews. Four years later Jochebed bore Amram a son whom he named Aaron.

One day, as Miriam was sitting in the house, the spirit of prophecy came upon her, and she announced: "My parents will have another son, who shall deliver Israel out of the hands of the Egyptians!" After the expiration of six months, Jochebed gave birth to another son. The child entered this world on the seventh day of the month of Adar, in the year two thousand six hundred and sixty-eight after the Creation, and in the one hundred and thirtieth year of the sojourn of the Israelites in Egypt. When he was born, the

house was filled with light as with the brightest sunshine.

The mother's anxiety for her son was increased when she noted his beauty, for he was like an angel of God in his size and noble appearance. The parents called him Tobias (God is good), but others say he was called Jekutiel (Hope in God). Amram kissed his daughter Miriam on the brow and said: "Now I know that your prophecy was true."

2. *Moses Is Saved*

Jochebed hid the child for three months, but after that she could no longer hide him, for she knew that the Egyptians were watching her, and should the child be discovered, she and her husband would be killed by the king's officers.

Jochebed took rushes, fashioned them into a basket, which she coated with pitch and then lined it with clay, in order that the smell of the pitch might not irritate her dear little one. She took the basket and, after putting the child into it, placed it in the Red Sea, at the point where (at that time) it was joined by the Nile. Amram, forced to expose the child to danger, smote Miriam on the head, and said: "Now, daughter, where is your prophecy?"

Miriam followed the basket as it floated in and out among the reeds; for Miriam was wondering whether or not her prophecy would come true.

At that moment the angels surrounded the

throne of Divine Justice and complained: "Lord of the world, shall this wonderful child perish this day by water?"

"Ye know that I behold all things," replied the Almighty. "This child shall not perish by water, for he is destined to chant, at the head of My chosen people, the great song of deliverance from water. They that seek to find salvation in their own evil ways, shall find destruction, but they who trust in Me shall never be confounded. The history of this child shall be a witness to My almighty power."

Now Malol, king of Egypt, had only one daughter, whom he greatly loved. Thermutis was her name. She had been married for some time but was childless. This troubled her greatly, for she desired a son who might succeed her father to the throne of Egypt.

At the time Jochebed's child was abandoned by his parents, God caused the weather to become unbearably hot, and the people suffered greatly from its effects. Thermutis, the daughter of Pharaoh, also suffered, and she went to seek relief from the burning heat by bathing in the waters of the Nile.

On reaching the bathing-place, she observed the little basket floating among the bulrushes on the surface of the water, and sent one of her maids to swim out and to bring it to her. But the other servants protested and said: "O princess, this is

one of the Hebrew children, who were cast into the river according to the command of your father. It happens sometimes that a decree issued by the king is unheeded, yet it should be observed at least by his own children and the members of his family. It certainly behooves you not to oppose the order of your father and act against his will."

Scarcely had the maidens uttered these words than they vanished from the face of the earth. The angel Gabriel had caused them all to sink into the bosom of the earth, save the one who swam for the basket.

The princess became very eager to know what the basket contained, and could not wait until the maid returned with it. She stretched forth her arm to reach it, but the basket was sixty ells away from her. God wished that her effort be not in vain; He therefore caused her arm to be lengthened, so that she was able to take hold of the basket and draw it up on the shore.

Eager to know the contents of the basket, Thermutis opened it, and was astonished to behold the face of a child of a splendor like that of the sun. She looked at it with wonder, and admired its beauty. But she soon thought of her father's stern decree about the Hebrew children, and was about to return it to the waters and abandon it to its fate. At that moment Gabriel came down from

heaven, gave the child a box on the ear so that it began to weep, and little Aaron, aged three, who had been watching with Miriam, wept also. The princess, touched by the weeping of the two children, decided to save the wonderful babe.

Miriam, who had hid away among the rushes, moved not one way or the other and anxiously awaited the result. God then said: "Because Miriam has done this out of pity for her brother, therefore a day will come when six hundred thousand foot-soldiers shall wait for her; the priests, the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and the seven clouds of glory shall not move until she shall be wholly healed from her illness and able to proceed on the way."

The princess then called an Egyptian woman, and bade her suckle the child, but the infant would not take the breast from the woman. She called for other Egyptian women, but he would not take milk from their breasts either. For God said: "Let the good mother who took care of so many Hebrew little children, be now rewarded and have her own child restored to her." He therefore caused the babe not to take any nourishment from an Egyptian woman.

Then Miriam, the babe's sister, joined those who came up, and said to the princess: "Noble Lady! vain are all your attempts to give the child the breast from one of a different race. If you would

have a Hebrew woman, then let me fetch one, and the child will suck at once."

This advice pleased the princess and she said to Miriam: "Go and seek out for me a Hebrew mother to take care of this child."

With winged steps Miriam hastened home, and brought her mother Jochebed to the princess. Then the babe readily took nourishment and ceased to cry. Astonished at this wonder, the king's daughter said to Jochebed, unaware that she was speaking the truth: "Here is what is yours. Take and nurse the babe for me, and your wage shall be two pieces of silver a day." Jochebed did as she was bidden, but better reward than all the silver in Pharaoh's palace was the mother's joy at having her son restored to her.

On the self-same day the soothsayers and the star-gazers said to Pharaoh: "The child of whom we spoke to you, that should free Israel, has this day met his fate in the waters." Therefore the king withdrew the cruel decree ordering all the male children to be drowned in the Nile.

The soothsayers and the star-gazers had seen something in the stars but misinterpreted it. Water was indeed the doom of Moses, but that did not mean that he would perish in the waters of the Nile. It had reference to the waters of Meribah, the waters of strife, and how they would cause his death in the desert before he completed his task of bringing Israel into the promised land.

3. *The Babe Is Named Moses*

For two years the child stayed with his parents. They gave him various names. His father called him Eber. His mother's name for him was Jekuthiel. To his sister Miriam he was Jared. His brother Aaron called him Abi Zanoah. His grandfather knew him as Abi Gedor, and his nurse called him Abi Socco.

After a lapse of two years Jochebed weaned him, and brought him to the king's daughter. Thermutis, charmed with the beauty and intelligence of the child, took him into the palace, and named him Moses (who was drawn out of the water). Thereupon a voice from heaven was heard crying: "Daughter of Pharaoh! because thou hast had compassion on this little child and hast called him thy son, therefore do I call thee Bithia (My daughter). The foundling whom thou cherishest shall be called by the name thou gavest him—Moses—and by no other name shall he be known, whithersoever his fame shall spread under the whole heaven."

On account of his exceeding beauty, every one that saw him was filled with admiration, and said: "Truly, this is a king's son." One day, when Moses was three years old, Bithia led him by the hand into the presence of Pharaoh. The queen sat by the king, and all the princes of the realm stood about him. Then Bithia presented the child

to the king, and said: "Oh, Father! this child of noble appearance is not really my son; he was given to me in wondrous fashion by the divine river Nile; therefore have I brought him up as my son, and destined him to succeed you on your throne since no child of my own has been granted to me." With these words Bithia laid the child in the king's arms, and he pressed him to his heart and kissed him.

4. *Gabriel Saves Moses*

One day Pharaoh was dining in his palace, with the queen at his right hand, his daughter Bithia with the boy Moses on her lap at his left, and Balaam the son of Beor with his two sons and all the princes of the realm sitting at table in the king's presence. The infant took the crown from off the head of the king and placed it on his own head.

The king and his nobles were terrified. They thought that this action betokened that evil would come to the king through the child that was before them. Then Balaam, the son of Beor, spoke to the king, saying: "My lord and king! do you not remember the interpretation of your dream, as your servant had interpreted it to you? This child is of Hebrew extraction, and is wiser and more cunning than befits his age. Let not the king imagine that, being a mere child, he did it without knowledge. It signifies that when he grows old he will

take the crown from your head and put it on his own.

"Thus have his ancestors ever done. Abraham caused the defeat of the armies of Nimrod, king of Babel, and of Abimelech, king of Gerar, and obtained possession of the land of the children of Heth and the whole realm of Canaan. Isaac prevailed over the king of the Philistines. Jacob took from his brother his birthright and blessing, and smote the Hivites. Joseph, the slave, became chief in the king's realm, and gave the best of this land to his father and his brothers. And now this child will take from you the kingdom, and will enslave or destroy your people. My advice, therefore, is, O king, that you slay this child before he grows up and becomes a menace to you and to your people."

"We will take other counsel," said Pharaoh, "before we decide the fate of this child."

The king then called for all the wise men of Egypt, and the angel Gabriel, in the form of an old man, appeared with the councillors. Some advised that the child be burned with fire, and others that he be slain with the sword. Then Gabriel spoke up, and said: "Let no innocent blood be shed. The child is too young to know what he is doing. Prove whether he has any understanding, before you sentence him to death. O king! let a bowl of live coals and a bowl of precious stones be placed before the little one. If

he takes the stones, then he has understanding and discerns between good and evil, but if he stretches his hand toward the burning coals, then we shall know that he is innocent and that he took the crown without any purpose or design."

This advice pleased the king, and he ordered his servants to do as the angel had suggested.

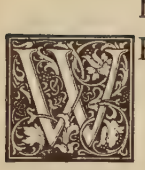
Now, when the basins were brought in and offered to Moses, he thrust out his hands to reach the jewels. But Gabriel, who had made himself invisible, caught his hand and directed it toward the red-hot coals. The coals burned the child's hand, and he lifted it and touched his mouth with it, thus burning part of his lips and part of his tongue; and this explains why Moses said, in after days: "I am slow of lips and slow of tongue."

Pharaoh and his councillors were now convinced of the simplicity of Moses, and no harm was done him. Then Bithia removed him from the king's presence, and brought him up in her own part of the palace.

God was with Moses and he increased in stature and beauty, and the heart of Pharaoh was softened toward him. Masters were brought for him from all parts of the country, and he was instructed in all the wisdom and learning of the Egyptians, and the people looked on him with hope as their future sovereign.

THE YOUTH OF MOSES

1. *Moses Among His People*



HEN Moses had passed beyond the years of childhood, he reached the summit of earthly greatness. He was acknowledged as the grandson of Pharaoh, and as the heir to the crown. But he cared not for all this greatness, for he had learned from his mother Jochebed, whom he visited very often, who were his true people, and who were his real parents.

Moses began to visit his brothers in Goshen almost daily, and he observed how his people were oppressed and how they groaned under their burdens. He inquired of the Israelites why the heavy burden had been put upon them, and he was told of the evil advice of Balaam against his people, and of the way in which Pharaoh had sought to destroy them all. Moses became very angry at Pharaoh and his evil advisers, but as he was unable to save his people, or to punish Balaam, he cried out: "Alas! I had rather die than to continue to behold the cruel oppression of my brothers."

Moses sought to ease the lot of the Israelites by

shouldering part of their burden and toil. He took the excessive loads of the women and old men, and laid them upon the young and the strong. By this Moses not only gave relief to the Israelites, but he also gained favor with Pharaoh, who thought Moses wished to have the work of building done sooner.

And a heavenly voice was heard, saying: "Moses, because thou hast dismissed all thought of high position at the king's court, and hast cast in thy lot with the suffering children of Israel, whom thou dost treat as thy brethren, therefore will I, too, lay aside all heavenly and earthly affairs and converse with thee only."

Moses also lightened the sufferings of the people by speaking encouraging words to them: "Be of good cheer, relief is not far off as you suppose—calm follows the storm, blue skies succeed black clouds, sunshine comes after rain."

2. *Sabbath Observed in Egypt*

Moses kept ever before his eyes the one aim of his life: to relieve his people from their heavy burdens. One day he presented himself before the king and said: "Sire! I have a petition to lay before you."

"Speak on, my son," Pharaoh answered.

Then spoke Moses: "It is a fact that if a slave is not given rest at least one day in the week, he will die from overwork. Now the children of Israel

are given no day of rest, but work from the first of the week to the last day. Their work is therefore unsatisfactory, and in time to come they will all perish from overwork. Give them rest one day in the week to renew their strength, and you shall have better work done and save the lives of your much-needed slaves."

"Which day shall be given them?" asked Pharaoh.

"Suffer them to rest on the seventh day," said Moses.

The king consented, and a royal decree was published in the whole realm of Egypt and in Goshen, as follows: "To the sons of Israel! Thus says the king: 'Do your work on six days, but on the seventh day you shall rest; on this day you shall do no labor. Thus shall you do at all times, according to the command of the king and the command of Moses the son of Bithia.' "

There was great rejoicing in the land of Goshen, wherever the king's command was published. The day appointed by Moses as the day of rest was Saturday, later ordained by God to the Israelites as the Sabbath day.

3. *The Flight of Moses*

Moses continued to do all he could to help out his suffering brothers. One day while young Moses was walking along in the streets of Goshen, he saw an Egyptian taskmaster mercilessly beating

one of the Hebrews. The anger of Moses was kindled against the Egyptian, he pronounced the name of God, and the Egyptian became a corpse.

Then Moses looked on the Hebrews who crowded around him and said: "God has declared that you shall be as the sand of the sea-shore. Now the sand falls and it is noiseless; the foot of man presses it, and it makes no sound. Therefore understand that you are to be as silent as the sand of the sea-shore, and tell not of what I have done this day."

The day after this incident occurred Moses again went to visit his brothers in Goshen. There were at their task two young men, brothers, Dathan and Abiram, of the tribe of Reuben. The brothers began quarreling with each other, and Dathan raised his hand to smite Abiram. Then Moses came up, stayed Dathan and exclaimed: "You wicked man, why do you strike your comrade? It is wicked for men to lay violent hands on one another."

"Beardless young man," said Dathan boldly, "who has made you ruler and judge over us? We know well that you are the son of Jochebed, though people call you the son of Bithia. Will you slay us as you did the Egyptian yesterday, by pronouncing the Name of God?"

Then Dathan and Abiram went before Pharaoh and told him that Moses had slain an Egyptian taskmaster. The king's anger was kindled

The Executioner stood over Moses with the sword

against Moses, and he cried: "Enough evil has been prophesied of him, and I did not heed it, and now he lifts his hand against my servants!" A royal order was issued for the arrest of Moses, and he was condemned to be put to the sword.

Moses was brought forth to be executed. He ascended the scaffold, and the executioner stood over him with the sword, the like of which was not to be found in the whole world.

Thereupon the angels presented themselves before God, and said: "Moses is held under restraint."

"I will contend his cause," God replied.

"But," the angels urged, "his death sentence has been pronounced; nay, they have led him to the place of execution, and the executioner is now standing over him with his sword."

"I will contend his cause," was again God's reply.

When the king gave the word, the headsman mightily smote the outstretched neck of Moses with his sharp sword. But the Lord turned the neck of Moses into ivory. Ten times did the headsman smite, and each time the sword proved ineffective and harmless.

Thereupon the angel Michael, in the guise of the executioner, took the sword, instantly gave to the headsman the appearance of Moses, and cut his head off, while Moses fled, unobserved, and went to the land of Midian.

MOSES IN MIDIAN

1. *Jethro*

ETHRO, one of the chief councillors of the king of Egypt, had, after taking flight from Egypt, taken up his residence in the land of Midian. The inhabitants of that land soon raised the good Jethro to the position of priest and prince over the whole tribe. But as time passed, Jethro grew more and more convinced that the idols he and his people served were vain and helpless, and he began to believe in the one true God.

One day he called together the people of the tribe, and said to them: "Behold I have grown old and am no longer able to perform the duties of priest before your gods. Choose therefore whomever you like to be in my place." The Midianites found out later that Jethro had given up his office because he despised their gods, and they placed

him under ban, that none might give him aught to eat or drink, or serve him.

Jethro was greatly troubled by this, for all his shepherds had forsaken him, as he was under ban, and he was unable to obtain even the slightest help from any of the sons of the tribe. Thus it was that his seven daughters were compelled to pasture and water the flock.

When Moses entered Midian, he arrived near a well and sat down to rest from his journey. While sitting by the well, he saw the seven daughters of Jethro approaching with their flocks.

The maidens had gone early to the well, for they feared that the shepherds should molest them on account of the ban and even refuse to let them take water for their sheep. Finding no shepherds at the well, they let down their pitchers in turn, and with much trouble filled the troughs. Suddenly the shepherds came up, drove them away, and led their sheep to the troughs the maidens had filled. But Moses stood up and rebuked the shepherds.

Then Moses let down his own pitcher into the well to fill it, and the water from the well leaped up and overflowed. He filled the troughs and let the flocks of the seven maidens drink, and then he watered the flocks of the shepherds, lest there should arise evil feeling among them. It was the same well at which Jacob had met Rachel, the well that God had created at the beginning of the

world, the opening of which He made in the twilight of the first Sabbath eve.

2. *The Wonderful Rod*

The seven maidens went home, and Moses secretly followed them so that no mischief befall them at the hands of the shepherds. Jethro was amazed to see his daughters return so soon from watering the flock, and he inquired of his daughters: "How is it that you have returned so soon to-day?"

"An Egyptian helped us water the flock, and saved us from the hands of the shepherds," the maidens replied. Moses had been standing outside of Jethro's house all this time, but did not correct the maidens' statement. At once there was heard a voice from heaven: "Because Moses had heard the daughters of Jethro describe him as an 'Egyptian,' and did not protest and say, 'No, I am no Egyptian but an Israelite,' therefore shall he be punished and die outside of the promised land, and his remains shall not be buried there."

"Where is the man that has shown such kindness to you?" asked Jethro. "Bring him to me." So Zipporah, one of the seven maidens, ran outside and bade Moses enter under their roof-tree and eat at their table.

When Moses came to Jethro, the old man asked where he came from, and Moses told him all that had happened to him in Egypt and in Ethiopia.

Then Jethro thought to himself: "This man has been driven out of Egypt and out of Ethiopia; he must be a dangerous man."

Then he took Moses, bound him in chains and threw him into a dungeon, where no food was sent him. But Zipporah loved him and was grateful to him for the kindness he had shown her. Every day she brought him food and drink, and Moses in return would instruct her in the law of the Most High.

Thus passed seven, or, as others say, ten years. In the meantime the Midianites were reconciled to Jethro, and many princes came to ask for the hand of Zipporah his daughter, who was as beautiful as the morning star.

Now in Jethro's garden there grew a wonderful rod. It is the rod that the Holy One, blessed be He, created in the twilight of the first Sabbath eve, and which He gave to Adam. Adam had given it to Enoch, from him it descended to Noah, then to Shem, then to Abraham, then to Isaac and finally to Jacob, who brought it to Egypt and gave it to his son Joseph. When Joseph died, the Egyptians pillaged his house, and the rod, which was a part of their booty, was taken to Pharaoh's palace. At that time Jethro was at the head of the most prominent of Pharaoh's sacred castes, and as such he had the opportunity of seeing the rod, on which was engraved the Ineffable Name, and the ten plagues which God would cause to visit the Egyptians at

a future day. Jethro stole the staff, and for many years it remained in his house. One day as he was walking in his garden carrying the rod, he stuck it in the ground. When he tried to take it out again, he found that it had sprouted, put forth blossoms, and he was unable to pull it out of the ground. "Now," said he to those who solicited the hand of his daughter Zipporah, "he, who can pluck this staff from the ground, shall take my daughter as his wife."

Then the strong chiefs of Edom and of Midian came and tried, but they could not move the staff.

One day Zipporah said to her father: "I recollect that many years ago you cast a man into a dungeon. Pray uncover the pit and look into it. If the man is dead, let his corpse be buried; but if he be alive, he is a godly man, and his life shall be spared."

Jethro was amazed at his daughter's recollection of the man in the dungeon, and he said: "Oh, I had forgotten him these many years; he surely must have died, for he has had no food."

"With God all things are possible," meekly replied Zipporah.

So Jethro went to the prison door, opened it, and to his great astonishment found the very man there whom he had cast into the dungeon ten years before. Then he brought him forth, kissed him, cut his hair, changed his garments, set him in his garden, and placed food before him.

Once, while in the garden, Moses noticed the wonderful rod planted there, and he went over to it and took it away. When Jethro returned into the garden, lo! Moses had the staff in his hand, whereupon Jethro cried out: "This is the man called by God to be a prince and a great man among the Hebrews, and to become famous throughout the world." And he gave him his daughter Zipporah to be his wife.

3. *Pharaoh's Punishment*

In the meantime Pharaoh continued to be cruel toward the children of Israel. God punished Pharaoh for his cruel actions and visited him with leprosy. This horrible disease covered his entire body, from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet.

The king summoned to him all the magicians and the wise men of his land, and said to them: "Advise me how I can be cured from this terrible malady."

"You can regain your health, O king," said his advisers, "only if you will slaughter Israelitish children and bathe in their blood."

Pharaoh accordingly ordered his officers to snatch babes from their mothers and slaughter them, and in the blood of these innocents he bathed. He suffered from the disease of leprosy for ten years, and every day an Israelitish child was killed for him, but it was all in vain. At the

end of this time his leprosy changed into boils, and he suffered more than ever.

At that time two of the king's officers came from Goshen and reported to the king: "The children of Israel are idle in their labor, and do not carry out the king's orders." This report angered the king greatly, and he said: "Now that I am ill they disregard my orders. Harness my chariot, and I will go to Goshen and punish those slaves for their disobedience."

The king was put upon a chariot, and he set out for Goshen, accompanied by many chariots and horsemen. When he and his men reached the border of Goshen, the king's steed entered a narrow passage, where it suddenly took fright, slipped, and fell. The chariot was upset and fell upon Pharaoh, and the horse too lay on the top of him. The king's flesh was torn and bruised, and he uttered wild shrieks of agony. His servants came to his rescue, put him on their shoulders and carried him back to Egypt. He knew that his end was near and the queen Alfar'anit and his nobles gathered about his bed and wept bitterly with him.

The princes and the king's councillors advised him to choose his successor to the throne. He had three sons and two daughters. The name of the first-born was Atro; the name of the second, Adikam, and the name of the third Moryon. Atro was an idiot, while Adikam was a clever man versed in all the wisdom of Egypt, but he was

very short and fleshy, and his beard flowed down to his ankles.

The king's suffering increased steadily, and he ordered that Adikam be brought before him, that he might be proclaimed king over the land of Egypt. At the end of three years the old king of Egypt died in shame and disgrace, after having reigned for ninety-four years.

4. *Children in the Place of Bricks*

Adikam was twenty years old when he succeeded his father. The Egyptians called him Pharaoh, as was their custom with all their kings, but the princes and the wise men called him Akuz, which means "short" in the Egyptian language. The new king surpassed his father Malol in wickedness.

He oppressed the children of Israel greatly and he made their yoke heavier. He went to Goshen to order their labor increased, and he said to them: "From this day on you must complete your task each day, and let not your hands slacken from the work, as you did in the days of my father." He appointed officers over them from amongst the children of Israel, and over these officers he appointed taskmasters from amongst the Egyptians.

A royal decree went forth that every Israelite must make a certain number of bricks each day. If for some reason or other an Israelite was unable to make the required amount of bricks, his house

was entered by the taskmaster, his children were taken from their mother by force and put into the building instead of the missing bricks. For each brick that was missing, the taskmasters took a child, and sometimes they even forced the fathers to put their own babies into the walls. The father would place his own child on the rising wall and cover him over with mortar and bricks. The father's tears would run down upon the child, while the child, buried alive, would weep and cry bitterly, but there was no one to heed his cries.

The groans and the sighs of the parents and the cries of the dying children reached heaven. God saw the burden of the children of Israel, heard their groans, and said: "The children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob have repented, and they are now crying unto Me; I shall deliver them from the hands of their cruel oppressor, from the hands of Pharaoh, king of Egypt."

MOSES APPOINTED BY GOD TO DELIVER HIS PEOPLE

1. *The Good Shepherd*

MOSES remained with his father-in-law, Jethro, who made him the shepherd of his flock. He watched over his flock with loving care, and he took care that no harm should befall the herds that were entrusted to him. He also took great care that his flock should do no harm to other men's property. He always chose an open meadow as his pasturing place, to prevent his sheep from grazing in private fields.

One day while Moses was tending his flock in a barren place, he saw that one of the lambs had left the flock and was trying to escape. The good shepherd pursued it, but the lamb ran so much the faster, and fled through valley and over hill, till it reached a mountain stream; then it halted and drank.

Moses now came up to it, looked at it with troubled countenance, and said: "My dear little friend! Then it was thirst that made you run so

far and seem to flee from me; and I knew it not! Poor little creature, how tired you must be!"

Moses then took up the lamb, placed it upon his shoulders, and carried it back to the flock.

While Moses was carrying the lamb, there came a voice from heaven: "Thou, who hast shown such great love, such great patience toward sheep, thou art surely worthy to be called upon to shepherd My people, the children of Israel."

2. *The Mission of Moses*

One day, as Moses was wandering with his flock in the desert, he reached Mount Horeb. He at once noticed that the mountain was a holy one, for the passing birds never alighted upon it. As he turned around, he saw a wonderful bush, all ablaze, but though the fire kept on burning, the bush was not consumed.

When Moses began to walk in the direction of the bush, he heard a voice, which was exactly like that of his father Amram, call out to him: "Moses, Moses!"

"Here I am," answered the overjoyed son, for he thought that it was his father who was calling him; "what is my father's wish?"

"I am not thy father," answered God. "I desired not to terrify thee, therefore I spoke in thy father's voice. I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."

Moses did not answer, but in silent reverence he covered his face, for he thought himself unworthy to look upon this Divine Apparition. God thereupon said: "Because thou art meek and thinkest that thou deservest not to look upon the Divine Apparition, therefore shalt thou stay with Me in heaven forty days and forty nights; thou shalt behold the Divine Presence, and thy face shall send forth beams, like the rays of the sun, so that people shall fear to approach thee."

God continued: "Moses my servant, the days of affliction that I allotted to Abraham's seed in My revelation to him have passed. Now the time has come for Me to fulfil My promise to their father Jacob, 'I will go down with thee into Egypt, and I will surely bring thee up again.' Go, therefore, before Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, and tell him to free My people."

"But who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh?" asked Moses. "And were it possible for me to bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt, how can I provide this great people with food and drink in the wilderness? How shall I be able to shelter them from the scorching heat or from rain? How shall I be able to provide the sick, the children and the babies, with their needs?"

"I will be with thee," came the reply from the midst of the thornbush. "I will provide My people with all their needs."

"But, Merciful God," argued Moses, who thought himself unfit for the mission, "Thou hast promised Jacob, 'I will surely bring thee up again out of Egypt.' Thou wert to do it Thyself, and now it is Thy purpose to send me thither. How can I venture to return to Egypt, where mine enemies are lying in wait for me?"

"Go, deliver My people from the land of their oppression," came the reply, "and I will be with thee whithersoever thou goest. I will be at thy side, and thou hast no cause to fear any man."

"But," pleaded Moses again, "if the children of Israel should ask me, 'Who sent you to us, and what is his name?' what shall I say to them?"

"I am known by My acts," answered God; "when I judge My creatures, I am called Elohim, 'Judge'; when I rise to do battle against the sinners, I am Lord Zabaoth, 'the Lord of hosts'; when I wield My might and power, My name is El Shaddai; and when I bestow My mercy upon the world, I am Adonai. But unto the children of Israel shalt thou say that I am He that was, that is, and that ever shall be; I am He that is with them in their bondage now, and He that shall be with them in their future bondage."

"But the life of Israel is now full of suffering and sorrow," said Moses, "why give them bad tidings of future suffering?"

"To them," said God, "say only that the Lord redeems them from their bondage. Tell them fur-

ther that at My will an angel can stretch out his hand from heaven and touch the earth, and at My will three angels can find room under one tree; at times My majesty can fill the whole world, and at others, when I will it otherwise, I speak from a bush."

3. *Moses Punished*

Moses still persisted and said: "Behold the people will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice, for they will say, 'The Lord has not appeared to you.'"

"What is this in thy hand?" asked the Most High.

"This is my rod," Moses answered.

"With this staff shalt thou prevail over Pharaoh," said God. "But thou deservest punishment for having suspected My children of lack of faith. The children of Israel are believers and sons of believers. Cast the rod upon the ground."

When Moses cast it upon the ground, the rod was transformed into a serpent. This was to show Moses that he had followed the example of the slanderous serpent. Moses turned his back to run from it; but God said: "Fear not, take it up by the tail;" and when Moses did so, it became a rod in his hand.

"Put thy hand into thy bosom," said the Most Holy. And when Moses obeyed, and drew it forth, it was leprous, as white as snow. Leprosy is the punishment for slander.

But Moses still argued and said: "A grandchild is closer to a man than his nephew. Nevertheless when Lot was taken captive, Thou didst send angels to the aid of Abraham's nephew. But now, when the life of sixty myriads of Abraham's descendants are at stake, Thou choosest to send me, and not the angels. When the Egyptian bondwoman Hagar was in distress, thou didst send five angels to stand by her, and to redeem sixty myriads of the children of Sarah thou sendest me. O Lord, deliver them, I pray thee, by the hand of him whom Thou wilt send in days to come."

"Not to Israel, but to Pharaoh, do I send thee," said God. "The one whom thou didst mention, will be sent to Israel at the end of days; Elijah will appear to them before the great and terrible day."

Moses was not yet satisfied. "O Lord of the world," he said, "but my brother Aaron is older than I am, and he is accustomed to prophesy to Israel in Thy name and comfort them in their distress. How can I then ignore the good work of my brother and take upon myself to be the redeemer of Israel?"

"Aaron will not begrudge this to thee," said the Almighty. "On the contrary, he will be greatly pleased with the honor I bestow upon thee. Behold now my Holy spirit has already come upon him and he is awaiting thee on the way to Egypt. Because thou hast hesitated to accept My mission,

thou wilt lose the priesthood, for it was ordained that thou shouldst be the priest and Aaron should be the Levite. But because thou hast refused to execute my will, thou shalt be the Levite and Aaron thy brother shall be the priest."

But Moses still hesitated and said: "I am slow of lip and tongue."

"Let not this trouble thee," came the response. "It is I that made the mouths of all that speak, and it is I that make men dumb. To one I give sight, another I make blind; one I cause to hear, another I make deaf. Had it been My will, thou wouldst have been a man of eloquence. But I desire to show a miracle through thee."

4. *From Midian to Egypt*

Moses finally gave in and said: "O merciful God, I am ready to accept Thy mission. However, I am not able to return to Egypt unless I first obtain the permission of my father-in-law Jethro, for he has been kind to me, and he has provided me with food and shelter."

God was pleased with this request and He told Moses that he should first go back to Midian and ask for permission to go to Egypt.

Jethro readily consented to the request of Moses and urged him to return to Egypt to redeem his suffering brothers from bondage.

At last Moses started upon his journey to Egypt with his wife and sons.

Then God appeared to Aaron and said: "Thy brother Moses is returning to Egypt, for I have chosen him to be My prophet, and thee have I appointed to be My spokesman. Arise and go forth to meet him." Aaron followed God's bidding and went forth to meet Moses.

Aaron beheld his brother near the mountain of God, and he ran to meet him; he embraced him and asked where he had spent all the years since their separation.

"I spent most of my time in Midian," answered the overjoyed Moses.

"And who are these people with you?" inquired Aaron.

"They are my wife and sons," replied Moses.

"Where are you going with them?" questioned Aaron.

"To Egypt," replied Moses.

"What!" exclaimed Aaron: "Great enough are our sorrows on account of those who already are in Egypt, and do you desire to take more into the land?" Moses agreed that Aaron was right and sent his wife and sons back to his father-in-law Jethro.

Moses then told Aaron of God's revelation to him and his mission. He even disclosed to him all the great secrets that were communicated to him on Mt. Horeb.

Arrived in Egypt, Moses called all the elders of Israel together and told them that God had

sent him to redeem all the children of Israel from the land of Egypt. In order to convince them of the truth of his story, he performed the miracles which God had shown him at Horeb. But the elders paid little attention to what Moses said. They knew that Jacob had confided to Joseph the secret mark by means of which they could find out the right person designated by God to be their redeemer. Joseph had confided the secret to his brothers, and Asher, the last of the brothers to die, had confided it to his daughter Serah, who was still alive. The elders went to Serah and told her the words of Moses. When she heard from them what Moses had said in the name of God: "I have surely visited you, and seen that which is done to you in Egypt," she exclaimed before the elders: "This is the true redeemer, for these are the very words by which the true redeemer was to announce the redemption in the name of God." Then all the elders and the people believed in Moses.

Moses thereupon invited the elders to go with him to Pharaoh, and tell him all that God had commanded him, so that he might let the children of Israel go free. But they lacked the courage to appear before the king. Though they all started out with Moses, they dropped off one by one stealthily on the way, and when Moses and Aaron stood in the presence of the king, they found themselves deserted by all the elders.

This greatly displeased the Lord, and He said:

"When My beloved servant Moses shall ascend the Holy Mountain to receive the Torah, they, the elders, shall not be permitted to ascend with him. They shall accompany him on the way to Me only as far as they have accompanied him on the way to Pharaoh, and they will have to wait for him until he comes down again."

BEFORE THE REDEMPTION

1. *In Pharaoh's Palace*

T so happened that the day Moses and Aaron appeared before Pharaoh was the anniversary of the king's birth. Many kings from all over the world had come to do him homage on this occasion.

"There are two old men at the gate of the palace, who seek admission," announced the attendant before the king.

"Did these old men bring me crowns?" questioned the king.

"They have brought nought with them, sire," came the reply.

"They cannot be admitted to my presence," said the king.

Now the king's palace was surrounded by a very big army. It was provided with four hundred entrances, one hundred on each side, and each of them was guarded by sixty thousand soldiers. Moses and Aaron, upon seeing this display of power, became frightened, but the angel Gabriel came and led them into the palace, observed by none of the guards.

"Who admitted these two old men into my palace without my permission?" cried the infuriated king. And he ordered that some of the guards be slain and others be tortured. Angrily he dismissed the two old men. New guards were then placed at the entrances, and in addition two lions were placed at each and every gate, and no man was allowed to enter the palace unless Pharaoh gave the word.

But the next day the same thing happened: Moses and Aaron were in the palace, and the guards were unable to hinder them. As for the lions, Moses but raised his rod, and they leaped toward him joyously, and followed him barking like dogs, into the palace.

"Who are you, and what is your wish?" cried Pharaoh.

"The God of the Hebrews has sent me to you to request that you let His people go on a three days' journey into the wilderness, to sacrifice unto Him," said Moses.

"What is the name of your God?" asked Pharaoh. "Why did he not send me a crown on my anniversary? I do not know who your God is, neither will I consent to let the children of Israel go."

But when Pharaoh looked up at the messengers of Israel, he was stricken with great awe. For in stature they were as tall as the cedars of the Lebanon, their countenances radiated rays like those

When Pharaoh looked at the messengers of Israel, he was stricken with awe

of the sun, and the pupils of their eyes shone like the morning star. He then said in a softer voice to them: "Wait until I fetch the books of the chronicles of my archives, wherein are recorded the names of the gods of all the nations, and I will see whether or not the God of the Hebrews is also recorded there."

The books were brought before the king, and he ordered the scribe to read to him the names of the gods contained in them. The scribe read off a long list of the names of gods: the god of Midian, of Ethiopia, of Ziddon, etc. "Now," said Pharaoh to Moses and Aaron, "there is no mention of your God in my chronicles."

"Oh, you fool!" exclaimed Moses and Aaron, "you seek the living in the graves of the dead. Your chronicles contain the names of the gods that are dead, but our God is the God of life, the King of eternal life."

"But what is your God?" asked the king. "Is He young or old? How old was He when He became king? How many countries has He under His dominion? How many battles did He fight and win? How many countries or cities did He conquer? How many warriors does He lead forth to war?"

"The strength of our God and His power fill the whole world," replied Moses and Aaron; "His voice calls forth flames of fire; his words break mountains into pieces. Heaven is His throne, and

the earth is His footstool. His bow is fire, His arrows are flames, His spears torches, His shield clouds, and His word the lightning-flash. He has created the mountains and the valleys. He has brought forth spirits and souls; He suspended the earth by a word; He covers the heavens with clouds; at His word the rain and the dew descend; He causes plants to grow from the ground; He nourishes and sustains the whole world. He removes kings from power or causes them to ascend the throne."

"I have no need of your God," answered Pharaoh. "I have created myself and the river Nile, and there is no other God besides me in Egypt."

Pharaoh then summoned all his wise men and said to them: "Have you ever heard of the God of these people?"

"We have been told that He is a son of the wise, the son of the ancient kings," the wise men replied.

Then spoke God, saying: "Ye fools! Ye call yourselves wise men, but Me ye call only the son of the wise. Verily, I will set at naught all your wisdom and your understanding."

2. *Moses Complains*

Pharaoh, having dismissed the ambassadors of God, called together the taskmasters whom he had appointed over the Israelites, and said to them: "You shall no longer provide the Hebrews with straw, as you have done heretofore. They must

go out into the fields to pick the straw themselves, and they shall nevertheless be required to deliver the prescribed number of bricks." He also ordered his taskmasters no longer to allow the Hebrews to rest on the Sabbath, but to compel them on this day too to make the required number of bricks.

The taskmasters called together the elders of Israel, and told them of the king's decree, and warned them under penalty of death to see to it that the royal edict be carried out. Thereupon the children of Israel began to wander about in the fields of the Egyptians to gather the straw they needed for the bricks. They were abused and beaten by the Egyptians, and the suffering of the enslaved people increased tenfold. When the children of Israel were unable to produce the required number of bricks, the taskmasters ordered the elders to disclose to them the names of all those who were delinquent. The elders refused to disclose them, and as a result were severely beaten by the taskmasters. Then spoke God to the elders saying: "Because ye were gentle and kind unto My suffering people, therefore a day will come when I will cause My holy spirit to rest upon you, and ye shall be honored and loved by all the people."

This frightful period of Israel's agony lasted six months. In the meantime Moses went to Midian, leaving Aaron alone in Egypt. When Moses

returned and saw the great suffering of his people, he was sorely vexed, and he said to God: "O Master of the world! The punishments meted out by Thee to the generation of the Deluge, to the generation of the Confusion of Tongues, and to the inhabitants of Sodom, were just. But what has this nation of Israel done unto Thee, that it is oppressed more than any other nation on the face of the earth? Is it because Abraham said, 'Whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it,' for which Thou didst rebuke him, saying: 'Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs'? Why, then, are not the descendants of Esau and Ishmael held in bondage, too? Are they not likewise the seed of Abraham? But if Thou wilt say, 'What concern is it of thine?' then I ask Thee, 'Why didst Thou send me hither as Thy messenger?' For behold, O Lord, Pharaoh deals wickedly with the children of Israel, and their redemption has not yet come."

The angel Shaftiel then presented himself before God and said: "Does it behoove Thy prophet to speak thus? Does he not know that Thou art able to accomplish whatever seems good in Thine eyes? He certainly deserves punishment for having spoken thus."

"But he spoke thus to Me not on his own behalf," answered God, "but out of compassion for the children of Israel, therefore his unbecoming words shall be forgiven."

3. *Moses Performs the Miracles Before Pharaoh*

God thereupon said to Moses: "Go to Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, and tell him again that I sent thee to deliver the children of Israel from their bondage, and if he refuses to listen to thee, let Aaron perform the miracles before him."

Moses and Aaron again came to the king's palace, and repeated the message of God.

"Who will believe that you are the messenger of God, as you pretend to be, if you do not convince me by performing miracles?" asked Pharaoh.

Aaron thereupon cast down his rod, and it became a serpent. Pharaoh laughed aloud. "What!" he exclaimed, "is this all you can do? The school children of my country can perform such miracles as you have done." He ordered little school children to be brought, and they also cast their rods to the ground and the rods were turned into serpents.

Immediately Aaron's serpent swallowed up all the serpents of the little magicians. But Balaam, the chief magician, and his friends said: "There is nothing wonderful about this, for it is nothing but natural for a living being to devour another living being. If you wish us to admit that the spirit of God rests upon you, let your rod, in its natural wooden state, swallow our rods in their original wooden state."

Aaron then took hold of the serpent's tail, and it became a rod again. He told the magicians to throw their rods to the ground. After that he cast down his rod to the ground, and it swallowed up their rods, yet his rod remained of the same size as before, showing no increase either in thickness or length. Pharaoh then began to wonder whether this marvelous rod in the possession of Moses and Aaron might not swallow him and his throne also.

But, encouraged by the Egyptians, Pharaoh refused to obey the command of God through Moses and Aaron, and he said to them: "Never will I allow six hundred thousand men to go away from my land, where I require their services."

God then told Moses and Aaron that He would bring plagues upon the Egyptians and that they would finally let the children of Israel go.

THE PLAGUES

1. *The Plagues Brought Through Aaron*

NE morning, as Pharaoh was walking by the bank of the Nile, Moses said to him: "Lo, if you refuse to let the children of Israel go, God will change all the waters of the land of Egypt into blood, and the Egyptians will have no water to drink." For three weeks Moses repeated this warning to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians, but they did not take it to heart.

By the command of God, Moses gave his staff to Aaron to bring on this plague. "For," said Moses, "let not the water which guarded me when I was a babe be smitten by me." Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of the land of Egypt, and the waters at once changed into blood.

The Egyptians had no water to drink, and they dug up new wells in the hope of finding water, but to their disappointment the new wells also contained nothing but blood. They then visited the land of Goshen and found that the Hebrews had plenty of good water to drink, but as soon as the Egyptians took cups full of

this water it turned into blood in their hands. Thereupon they requested that the children of Israel take handfuls of water and allow them to drink from their hands, but as soon as the water touched the lips of the Egyptians it turned into blood. They again begged of the Hebrews to drink water with them from one and the same bowl, but it was of no avail, for the water was turned into blood in their mouths.

This plague lasted for a week, but Pharaoh refused to consider that as a punishment from God, because the magicians of the land of Egypt were also able to turn water into blood. He therefore refused to let the Hebrews go out of his land.

Moses came again before Pharaoh, and for three weeks gave him warning of the next plague. This warning, too, went unheeded. Thereupon Aaron stretched forth the rod over the river, and a single big frog appeared. This frog began to croak, and called forth so many of his kind that the whole land of Egypt swarmed with frogs. There was not a single place in the land of Egypt which was not full of them. The ovens, the beds, the closets, and every nook in the houses, in the barns and in the fields were full of frogs.

The magicians of the land of Egypt were also able to bring forth frogs from the river. But the frogs brought forth by Aaron caused so much discomfort to all the Egyptians as well as to the king that he told Moses that he was ready to let the

people go, if this awful plague would be removed. Moses prayed to God and all the frogs died. No sooner had the frogs disappeared from the land of Egypt than the king hardened his heart again.

God thereupon sent the plague of vermin upon the land of Egypt. The third plague was also brought on through Aaron, for God said: "Let not the earth be smitten by Moses, for it shielded him when it concealed the Egyptian he had slain."

The magicians, as in the first two plagues, tried to imitate Aaron and produce vermin too, but they were unable to do so. "This is really the finger of God," the magicians admitted. But the heart of Pharaoh remained hard, and God told Moses that he would bring more plagues upon the land in order that the children of Israel might be freed.

2. *The Plagues Brought Through Moses*

Early in the morning, at the river's brink, Pharaoh was warned by Moses that God would bring another plague upon the land of Egypt, if he refused to let the people go. The king took not this warning to heart, and God sent a mixed horde of wild beasts, lions, bears, wolves and many kinds of birds of prey. They devoured many Egyptians all over the land, but in the land of Goshen, where the children of Israel lived, there was not a single wild beast.

Pharaoh then called Moses and said to him: "You have my permission to sacrifice to your God

as you desire, but you cannot go into the wilderness. You must stay in the land."

"How can we sacrifice animals in the land of Egypt, when your people are accustomed to worship them?" protested Moses. "Will they not stone us for it?"

"You may go then to the wilderness, but do not go too far away," said Pharaoh.

But when Moses prayed to God and the mixed horde of wild animals were removed from the land, Pharaoh again refused to let the people go. God then brought a fifth plague upon the land of Egypt, and this was a pestilence, which killed mostly cattle and horses. The Israelites again were not affected by the plague.

As the king still remained obstinate and would not let the people go, God brought a sixth plague upon the Egyptians. Moses and Aaron took each a handful of ashes of the furnace, and Aaron put his handful of ashes into the already filled hand of Moses and no part of it spilled to the ground. Moses then threw the ashes heavenward, and when it returned earthward, it scattered all over the land of Egypt. The small dust of the ashes produced boils upon the skin of the Egyptians. Even the magicians were covered with boils from head to foot, and they were unable to stand before Moses.

This plague over, God told Moses to go to Pharaoh and warn him that He would cause a grievous

hail to descend upon the land, the like of which had never been seen. As Moses was accustomed to meet Pharaoh in the morning on his daily walk along the brink of the Nile, the king gave up his morning walk. Moses therefore sought the king out in his palace in the early hours of the day, and spoke to him thus: "God will cause a terrible hail to come down upon the land, and it will kill whatever is found in the field. Make haste therefore and warn your servants to bring in their shepherds and their cattle from the fields, lest they be killed."

Pharaoh accordingly sent out a warning to all his people. But they did not heed his warning. There were but few who ordered their shepherds to remove the cattle from the fields. The king himself knew well that the hail would come down, as Moses had predicted, but remained unshaken in his obstinacy. God therefore caused a heavy hail-storm to come down upon the land of Egypt.

Said fire to water: "Come, let us make peace for the sake of doing the will of our Creator. Water shall not quench fire, and fire shall not cause the hail to melt." The men as well as the beasts that remained in the field were smitten by the hail, or burnt by the fire. Wheat in the field was destroyed, and trees were broken down by the hail.

The king lost no time, and sent for Moses and Aaron. Upon seeing them, he exclaimed: "Indeed, the Lord is righteous, and my people and I are wicked. Now, pray to God that He take this

plague away from us, and I will let the children of Israel go, as you desire."

Moses thereupon went a short distance out of the city, and there spread out his hands to God and prayed that He stay the hail. No sooner had he finished his prayer than the hail ceased. The hail that was in the air did not come down to the ground, but remained suspended in the air. Part of the suspended hail came down upon the Amorites when Joshua was engaged in battle with them.

As soon as the hail was removed from the land, Pharaoh again refused to let the people go, and Moses at once went to the palace and announced the coming of the eighth plague, the plague of locusts; but the king ordered Moses and Aaron to be expelled from the palace. Then God sent the plague of locusts. These locusts ate every herb in the land, and all the fruit of the trees that had survived the hail, and there remained not a green thing in the whole land.

Again Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron and said to them: "I have sinned against the Lord your God and against you. Now therefore forgive, I pray you, my sin this once, and entreat the Lord your God that He may remove this plague from our midst." Moses prayed to God on the king's behalf, and the plague was taken away.

Once relieved from this plague, Pharaoh again refused to let the Israelites go, and God caused the

ninth plague to come, the plague of darkness. The darkness was so dense, that the Egyptians were unable to see one another, and could not stir from their place. If they were sitting down they could not rise up, and if they were standing up, they could not sit down.

There were some of the people of Israel, who upon hearing the message of God sent through Moses, said: "Here in the land of Egypt we have become rich, and have plenty to eat and drink. Then why go in search of another land?" Now when darkness covered the land of Egypt, God said: "Because ye were well satisfied with your wealth and cared not for the sufferings of your brethren, ye shall die and be buried in Egypt, unperceived by the Egyptians."

THE DEPARTURE

1. *Pharaoh Drives the Israelites Out*

HEN Pharaoh refused to let the people go, God said to Moses: "One plague more will I bring upon the land, and then the king of Egypt will let you go. In the meantime tell the people to borrow from the Egyptians vessels of silver and gold, so that they come out of the land with great riches."

Moses then came to Pharaoh and said: "Behold, you have failed to hearken to the word of God until now; therefore about midnight God will go forth in the land and slay all the first-born of your people." But the heart of the king was hardened again and he would not let the Israelites go.

At midnight all the first-born of the land died. There was not a house in which there was not one dead, and the cry of the Egyptians rose to heaven. The king and his servants rose in the dark of night, and together with Bithia, the foster-mother of Moses, they went to look for Moses and Aaron. When finally Pharaoh reached the door of the house where Moses lived, he called out to Moses and asked him to pray to God for his sake.

"Why have you brought all this evil upon my people and me?" asked Bithia.

"Ten plagues did the Lord bring upon Egypt; did any of these plagues affect you?" inquired Moses.

"None did any harm to me," answered Bithia; "but when I see the evil plight of my father, my brothers and all my people, I do not rejoice in the security I enjoy."

"They would not hearken unto the voice of the Lord," said Moses, "therefore did all this evil come upon them. Let your father but proclaim that the children of Israel are no longer to be considered as his slaves, but the servants of the Lord our God, and you shall all be saved from death."

Immediately Pharaoh replied: "Pray, go forth from out of the land of Egypt, both you and your people and all that belongs to you, as you are now free men, no longer the slaves of Pharaoh. But pray do not tarry."

"Although you are a first-born, you shall not perish," said Moses, "for God preserves your life in order to show you His greatness and His might."

While all the Israelites were busily engaged in acquiring riches, Moses thought of Joseph's coffin. He knew that Israel could not leave Egypt without it, on account of the oath they had taken. For three days and three nights preceding the departure from Egypt, Moses hunted up and down

through the land of Egypt in search of the coffin. But his searching was in vain; the coffin was nowhere to be found.

Finally Serah, the daughter of Asher, met Moses who had become tired and exhausted, and she asked in amazement: "Why this weariness? wherefore this sad look?"

"For three days and three nights I have made a fruitless search for Joseph's coffin," Moses replied. "You, as the only survivor of the house of Jacob, peradventure may know where his coffin is to be found?"

Silently Serah took Moses to the river Nile, and pointing with her finger, said: "In this very spot rests the coffin of Joseph. At the time of his death, the Egyptians, knowing that the Jews could not depart from their land without the bones of Joseph, made a leaden coffin for him, sealed it up on all sides, and sank it in the Nile. The magicians with their arts put it in a place from which it could not be removed."

Thereupon Moses took Joseph's cup, and cut four flat plates out of it. He engraved a lion on one of them, an eagle on the second, a bull on the third, and a human figure on the fourth. He threw the first, with the lion on it, into the river, and said: "Joseph, Joseph, the hour for the redemption of Israel has arrived, the Divine Presence lingers here only for thy sake, the clouds of glory await thy coming. If thou wilt show thy-

self, well and good; if not, then we are released from our oath." But the coffin remained in the depths of the Nile.

Then Moses threw the second plate into the river, the one with the figure of the eagle on it, and repeated the same words, but the coffin remained at the bottom of the Nile. He threw into the water the third plate, bearing the figure of the bull, and called upon Joseph for the third time to come forth, but the coffin failed to rise from the bed of the river. Finally he threw the fourth plate into the river, that with the figure of the human being on it, and requested Joseph to come forth, and this time the coffin rose to the surface of the water. Moses seized it, and with great happiness carried it off.

The Israelites, laden with gold and silver, which God told them to take from the Egyptians as payment, in part at least, for all the work they had done for them, departed from the land of bondage, led by their immortal leaders Moses and Aaron.

2. *Uzza*

When the children of Israel departed from Egypt, Uzza, the angel of the Egyptians, appeared before God and said: "O Lord of the world! I have a claim to make against the nation which Thou hast brought forth out of Egypt."

"State thy claim," ordered God.

"O Lord of the world!" said Uzza, "Thou in

Thy wisdom didst decree that the people of Israel should be held in bondage by my people, the Egyptians, for a period of four hundred years. But they have served the Egyptians only eighty-six years, therefore the time of their deliverance has not yet come. If it be Thy will, give me permission to take them back to Egypt, that they may continue in slavery for the three hundred and fourteen years that are left, and that Thy word may be fulfilled."

"Make thou answer to Uzza's claim," said God to Michael, who had listened to the complaint with anxiety. Thereupon Michael spoke, saying:

"The Lord decreed that the children of Israel serve the Egyptians not because they had sinned against them and deserved punishment therefor, but because their forefather Abraham had spoken unbecomingly in the presence of the Almighty. When God spoke to him saying, 'I am the Lord that brought thee out of the land of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit,' he made answer, 'How shall I know that I shall inherit it?' Then did God say to him, 'Thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs! Now the four hundred years of exile have passed, for they had been strangers in lands not belonging to them since the birth of Isaac. Thou therefore hast no right to keep Israel in bondage any longer."

When Uzza heard Michael's words, he made no answer, and the Lord decided in favor of

Michael and decreed that Israel remain no longer in slavery in the land of Egypt.

3. *Pharaoh Pursues the Hebrews*

Pharaoh and his servants were under the impression that the Hebrews would return to the land after a three days' journey. When the three days were over and Pharaoh saw that the Hebrews failed to return, he sent an army headed by his officers with orders to bring them back. Upon reaching the camp of Israel, the officers found them feasting and celebrating.

"By the order of the king of Egypt, whose slaves you have hitherto been, I bid you go back to Egypt, as the three days are over," said the head officer of Pharaoh.

"The Lord our God, who has brought us forth from the land of Egypt," answered Moses, "has commanded us not to return to Egypt, but to go to a land flowing with milk and honey."

The officers of the king ordered their men to attack the Hebrews. In the encounter that ensued most of the king's men fell dead. Those few that were left went back to Egypt and reported to their king that the Hebrews had refused to come back.

Upon receiving this report, the hearts of the king and his men were turned against the Israelites. "We were smitten with plagues, we were forced to let our slaves depart from us, and now we have to sit by and see them get away with our

riches," they all declared. "This is more than we can endure." The king therefore induced the people to make war against the Israelites, saying: "In this war I will not remain secure in the rear, as heretofore, but I will ride at the head of the army; I will take no more of the booty than any one of you, and I will waive the privilege I have of choosing and taking whatever I desire; furthermore all my treasuries will be opened, and all the silver, gold and precious stones they contain will be divided equally among you."

Without waiting for his servants, Pharaoh with his own hand prepared his chariot, and the nobles followed his example. These were soon joined by all the Egyptians with their chariots, greatly outnumbering the Israelites. The army covered in one day the ground which it had taken the Israelites three days to traverse.

The Israelites, on beholding the hosts of Pharaoh approach, were greatly terrified. Before them was the sea, behind them the powerful Egyptian armies, and on both sides the wild beasts of the desert. In their terror, they were unable to agree as to what to do. There were four parties advancing different opinions. The first contended that it would be best for them to seek death by drowning in the sea; the second held that it would be best for them to return to Egypt and let the Egyptians do with them whatever they saw fit; the third was in favor of waging war against the

Egyptians; while the fourth thought it would be advisable to intimidate the Egyptians by setting up a great noise.

To the first party Moses said: "Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord"; to the second he said: "The Egyptians whom you have seen this day you shall never more see again"; to the third: "The Lord will fight for you"; and to the fourth: "You shall hold your peace."

"What, then, shall we do?" the spokesmen of these parties asked their leader.

"You shall bless, praise and glorify Him that is the Lord of war," answered the leader.

Instead of making use of their weapons of war, the Israelites prayed to God, thus obeying the words of their forefather Jacob, that it is unbecoming for the sons of Israel to fight with sword and bow, but that prayer shall be their sword, and supplication, their bow. And the Lord hearkened unto their prayer, and determined to save them.

4. *The Red Sea Is Divided*

Moses, too, implored God to save his people from this desperate situation.

"Moses," said God, "My children are in distress, the sea blocks the way before them, and the enemy is right behind them, and thou standest here and prayest. If for the sake of a single human being, Adam, I ordered that the waters upon the face of the earth be gathered into one

place, shall I not do the same for this holy people? My children's prayer preceded thine, now there is nothing left for thee to do but to lift up thy rod, stretch thy hand over the sea, and divide it."

In the meantime the cloud of glory which preceded the children of Israel on their journey in order to illumine the road for them in the desert, descended and placed itself between the Israelites and the Egyptians, forming a partition between them. This cloud cast rays of light upon the camp of the Hebrews, while the armies of Pharaoh it veiled in darkness.

Moses ordered the Israelites to draw nearer the shore, and, stretching out his rod over the sea, said: "I am the messenger sent by the Creator of the world! Uncover thy paths, O sea, for His children, that they may go through thy midst on dry ground."

"I will not do thy bidding," answered the sea, "for thou art only a man born of woman, and, besides, I am three days older than thou, O man, for I was created on the third day of the Creation, and thou on the sixth."

"O God," exclaimed Moses, "the sea refuses to do Thy will."

"What does a master do with a disobedient servant?" inquired God.

"He beats him with a rod," said Moses.

"Do thus!" ordered God. "Lift up thy rod, and stretch out thy hand over the sea, and divide it."

Moses raised his rod—the rod which had been created at the beginning of the world, upon which was engraven the great Name, and with which he had wrought the miracles in the land of Egypt—and stretched his hand over the sea, but the sea remained obdurate.

When, however, the sea beheld God in His glory at the right hand of Moses, it spoke to the earth, saying: "Make hollow places for me, that I may hide myself therein before the Lord of all created things, blessed be He!" The earth obeyed, and the waters of the Red Sea divided to let Israel pass on dry ground. Twelve paths were opened up in the sea, one for each of the tribes. The water became as transparent as glass, and each tribe could see the others.

5. *In the Red Sea*

On approaching the sea, the Israelites saw that the ground was not yet dry. The tribe of Reuben, on beholding the clay at the bottom of the sea, protested and said to the children of Simon: "While in Egypt our lives were made miserable with clay, and now Moses has brought us here that we may sink in this fearful clay. We refuse to enter." The tribe of Simon agreed with the Reubenites, and likewise decided not to follow Moses into the sea.

While most of the people were thus complaining, the sons of Benjamin jumped into the Red

Sea, followed by the tribe of Judah. "I will reward these two tribes for their faith in Me," said God. "I will cause My holy Temple to be built in Benjamin's portion of the holy land, and from Judah kings shall come forth."

Thus the Israelites passed through the Red Sea in safety, while the waters of the sea rose like walls on both sides of them. God also caused all kinds of dainty fruit to grow out of the sea, and if a child cried while it lay in the arms of its mother, all she needed was to stretch out her hand and pluck any kind of fruit she desired and quiet the child with it.

In the meantime the armies of Pharaoh were steadily approaching the Red Sea. They were still undecided as to what to do with the Israelites. Some of them said that it would be enough merely to take away from the Israelites all the gold and silver they had, while others insisted also on killing them all. But without hesitation, they followed the children of Israel into the sea.

6. *The Egyptians Are Drowned*

God in His glory appeared on the scene and desired to drown the Egyptians, but Uzza, the Angel of the Egyptians, drew near and said: "O Lord of the world! Thou art called just and upright; why then dost Thou desire to make my children perish in the sea? Have my children drowned or slain a single one of Thy children? If

it be on account of the rigorous slavery that my children imposed upon Israel, then consider that Thy children have received their wages, in that they took the silver and golden vessels from them."

God then summoned all the angels, and said: Judge ye in truth between Me and yonder Uzza, the Angel of the Egyptians. In bygone days I brought famine upon his people, and My beloved Joseph, through his wisdom, saved them from destruction, and they all became his slaves. But when My children came into their land as strangers, they were in turn made slaves by the Egyptians. My children groaned under their heavy yoke, and I sent Moses and Aaron, My faithful messengers to Pharaoh, to save them. When they spoke to him in My name, he refused to listen to them. I punished him, but he remained obstinate and he made the yoke of the children of Israel still heavier and their lives more bitter. Now when I redeemed My children from his heavy yoke, he seeks to destroy them."

When God had finished speaking, the heavenly judges called out: "Thou, O Lord, art just in all Thy ways, Pharaoh and his host deserve the punishment Thou metest out to them."

Uzza heard their verdict, and he pleaded: "O Lord of all the worlds! My people deserve the punishment, but be Thou merciful and have pity upon the works of Thy hand."

In an instant, Angel Michael flew to Egypt,

fetched a piece of a wall in which a Hebrew child had been put in place of mortar, and standing with it in the presence of God, said: "O Lord of the world! Wilt Thou have pity upon this people, who killed innocent children so cruelly?" This silenced Uzza, and God resolved to drown the Egyptians in the sea.

The waters of the sea instantly began surging back, and the Egyptians were drowned. This happened at that hour of the morning when the holy hosts of heaven were wont to sing praises to the Almighty. They now gathered in great multitudes and were about to sing, when God silenced them with the following words: "The works of My hand are drowning in the sea, and ye desire to sing praises unto Me?"

God caused the Egyptians to be washed ashore, so that the Israelites might not say that the Egyptians were likewise saved from drowning. Throwing out the corpses, the sea said to the earth: "Take thy children to thyself, for I do not want them to pollute my waters."

"I still remember the curse pronounced upon me for having received the blood of a single person Abel; how much severer will be my punishment for drinking in the blood of so many slain people," replied the earth. "Therefore, O sea, keep within thee all those whom thou hast slain."

"I shall not punish thee for receiving the Egyptians," said God to the earth. Thereupon the

The waters of the sea surged back, and the Egyptians were drowned

earth opened and buried all the corpses that lay beside the sea.

7. *The Great Booty*

When Moses and Israel beheld the Egyptians dead upon the sea-shore, they prepared to sing praises to the Lord. All the angels in heaven, too, were about to sing praises to God for having delivered His chosen people from the land of bondage. But God bade them wait, saying: "Let my children sing first."

All the children of Israel raised their eyes heavenward and began to sing praises to God. Infants as yet unable to speak opened their mouths and joined in the song; even babes stopped sucking their mothers' breasts and joined in the melody. Thus there was not one soul in Israel who did not offer praise to God for the great deliverance. All in the camp of Israel were permitted to behold the glory of God; yea, even the female slaves in Israel were allowed to see more of the Presence of God at the dividing of the Red Sea than the Prophet Ezekiel was ever permitted to behold.

The sea cast up many jewels, precious stones and other treasures which had ornamented the Egyptian warriors and their horses, and the Israelites thus acquired great wealth. When Moses told them that it was time to march forward and begin their journey to the promised land, the Israelites were loath to leave the spot. Moses rebuked

them: "Think you the sea will forever continue to yield you jewels and pearls?" Thereupon the Israelites, without complaint or murmur, followed their great leader into the wilderness.

LAG BEOMER

LAG BEOMER

During the six weeks that elapse between Passover and Shabouth, the Jews observe customs of mourning. They do not cut their hair, they do not indulge in mirth, and do not even celebrate weddings. The reason being that during these days a pestilence broke out among the disciples of the great sage, Rabbi Akiba, during the revolution against the Romans, headed by Bar Kokhba.

On the thirty-third day of the counting of the Omer, which is begun on the second day of Passover, that pestilence ceased. For this reason, it is observed as a semi-holiday; weddings can take place then, and one may likewise indulge in merriment. On that day it is customary for Hebrew school children to go on outings and shoot arrows. Especially in Palestine is this day celebrated with great pomp, merriment and joy by all school children.

Read the following story describing the revolution against the Romans, and you, too, will be imbued with the same patriotic zeal which filled our forefathers in days of old.

THE REVOLT AGAINST THE ROMANS

1. *The Uprising Against Trajan*

FTER the destruction of the Temple by Titus, the Jews suffered greatly under the emperors of the Flavian dynasty. Domitian, who succeeded Titus to the crown of Rome, was very cruel toward the Jews. But his successor Nerva was more humane and tolerant toward the Jews. Unfortunately his reign was very short, for it lasted only sixteen months.

Nerva chose as his successor to the throne the Spaniard Ulpianus Trajan, who was then sixty years old. He was very cruel toward the Jews, and the suppressed people rose in revolt against the Roman tyrant. The leaders of the rebellion in Judaea, were the two very courageous men from Alexandria, Julianus and Pappus.

On the night of the Ninth of Ab, when the Jews mourned in commemoration of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, the wife of Emperor Trajan gave birth to a son. This newly born prince happened to die the following Hanukah,

when the Jews celebrated the anniversary of the victory of Judas Maccabee over the Greeks.

The Jews hesitated and said to one another: "What shall we do under these circumstances? If we celebrate, the emperor may take that as an insult." After much deliberation, they said: "Let us light the candles and celebrate, and come what may."

Slanderers then came to the wife of Trajan and said: "See what friends the Jews are to Rome. When you gave birth to a son, they mourned and wept, and when your son died, they celebrate and rejoice."

Enraged by this report, she sent a message to Trajan: "O sire, why exert all your energy to subdue barbarians? Rather come and suppress the revolt of the Jews, for they have rebelled against you."

Trajan at once embarked in a vessel, and figured on reaching Judaea within ten days, but aided by favorable winds, he arrived there at the end of five days. When he came to Judaea, he entered a house of study, and he heard the students explain the verse: 'The Lord will bring a nation against thee from far . . . as the vulture swoopeth down."

"I am the one you refer to," exclaimed Trajan. "I expected to arrive here in ten days, but the winds brought me here in five days." He ordered his legions to surround the students, and to slay all of them.

At the command of Trajan, the women, too, were put to the sword. The blood of the women mingled with the blood of the men, forming a stream, and the blood of the slain could be traced in the sea as far as Cyprus.

The Roman general Lucius Quietus, who was delegated by Trajan to suppress the revolt of the Jews, treated the rebels with the utmost cruelty. Julianus and Pappus, the leaders of the revolt, fell into the hand of Quietus. The general sarcastically remarked to the two heroes: "If you belong to the same people as did Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, then let your God come and deliver you out of my hand, as he delivered them out of the hands of Nebuchadnezzar."

"Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah were very pious men, and Nebuchadnezzar was an independent ruler, therefore they were worthy that a miracle should occur for their sake. But you are nothing but the servant of one higher up, and therefore you are scarcely worthy that a miracle should occur for your sake. We are condemned to destruction by the Almighty, and if you do not slay us, He has many other executioners: there are many bears, many lions and many tigers who meet a human being and kill him. The Holy One, blessed be His name, chose to deliver us into your hands; but know that He will avenge our blood upon you."

Unmoved by the plea and heroism of the two

rebel leaders, Quietus ordered that they be executed. But while the two prisoners were being led to a martyr's death, a despatch was received announcing the death of the Roman Emperor Trajan, and by the command of the new Emperor Hadrian, the head of Quietus was battered with clubs until he gave up his ghost.

2. *Bar-Kokhba*

The new Emperor Hadrian was well disposed toward the Jews at first, and he even permitted them to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. But the Samaritans slandered the Jews, and the emperor ordered that the Temple be erected on a different site. This enraged the Jews, and many people armed themselves and assembled in the valley of Rimmon ready to wage war against the Romans. But, as has been related, the peaceful R. Joshua allayed the anger of the excited people by relating a fable to them.

The tolerant relations between Hadrian and the Jews did not last very long. The Roman emperor wanted the Jews to merge with the Romans and become one people. He therefore ordered that Jerusalem be rebuilt, but not as a city for the Jews, but for the pagans. This filled the Jews with resentment, and they rose in open revolt against Hadrian.

The chief hero of this revolt was Bar-Kokhba

who inspired the Roman empire with terror. The real name of this hero was Bar-Koz'ba. But R. Akiba, who was actively engaged in delivering his people from the Roman yoke, was so much impressed by the imposing personality of the hero that he applied to him the verse: "A star (kokhba) has arisen in Jacob." Henceforth the hero was known as Bar-Kokhba.

Akiba was so much carried away by enthusiasm that he believed Bar-Kokhba to be the real Messiah, who was destined to relieve the Jews from foreign yoke. Johanan ben Torta, a teacher of the Law, said to the enthusiastic rabbi: "Akiba, grass will grow from your chin long before the Messiah appears."

The homage the very beloved teacher R. Akiba paid to Bar-Kokhba, and the supernatural strength of the rebel leader, gained him many followers. Bar-Kokhba was so powerful that he used to throw back with his knees the huge stones which the Romans hurled upon the Jewish army by means of machines.

Jews from all countries, impelled by the desire to shake off the unbearable Roman yoke, poured into Judaea to aid the Messianic king Bar-Kokhba. But Bar-Kokhba would not enlist every applicant in his army. He would put every recruit to the test. If the applicant would, without complaint and without showing any signs of suffering, have his thumb cut off, he was declared eligible to join

the revolutionary army. The number of those who submitted to such painful operation reached two hundred thousand.

The sages then sent a message to the Messianic king: "How long will you keep on maiming the children of Israel?"

"How else can I test their courage and their faithfulness?" asked Bar-Kokhba.

"Put them to this test," replied the sages: "He who is unable to uproot a cedar-tree from the Lebanon, while riding on horse, shall not be eligible to join your ranks."

Bar-Kokhba followed the advice of the sages, and he put the recruits to the test they suggested. In a short period of time there were additional two hundred thousand soldiers enlisted, who were able to uproot a cedar from the Lebanon while riding on horseback. The Messianic king felt so confident of his own courage and that of his numerous warriors, that he uttered a blasphemy: "Lord, if Thou dost not help us, at least do not help our enemies, and we shall not be defeated. For hast not Thou, O God, cast us off? And Thou goest not forth, O God, with our hosts."

T. Annius Rufus, the Roman governor, was defeated by Bar-Kokhba. The defeated Roman commander withdrew from one citadel to another, and a great number of fortified cities and villages fell into the hands of the rebels. The new forces sent by Hadrian also suffered defeat at the hands

of Bar-Kokhba, and the rebel leader remained king over Judaea for two years.

3. *The Capture of Bethar*

Hadrian, who at first thought little of the Jewish rebellion, now realized the seriousness of the situation. Every new general he sent against the Jews suffered defeat on the battle-fields of Judaea, and Hadrian was obliged to summon his greatest general, Julius Severus, to suppress the revolt. Severus was at that time engaged in suppressing the revolt of the Britons, but he was recalled to Judaea to match swords with Bar-Kokhba.

On his arrival, Severus found the military position of the Jews so secure, that he did not dare to engage them in battle at once. He decided first of all to cut off all the food supplies from Bar-Kokhba's army, and thereby force them to surrender.

Finally Severus forced Bar-Kokhba and his army to retreat to the strongly fortified city of Bethar. For three years, Severus laid siege against Bethar, but was unable to conquer it. Hadrian and his general were about to raise the siege, when a Samaritan came to their assistance.

Now, in Bethar there lived a saintly man, whose name was Eleazar of Modin. This pious man would every day pray to God, in sackcloth and ashes, that Bethar might not fall into the hands of the enemy. The Samaritan said to the Roman

emperor: "As long as that hen cackles in ashes, Bethar will not be captured. Do not give up the siege, but wait for me, and I will bring about its fall."

Thereupon the Samaritan entered the besieged city through a subterranean passage. He walked over to the saintly R. Eleazar while he was engaged in prayer, and feigned that he was whispering something in his ear. Those who were present, became suspicious of the secrecy between the Samaritan and R. Eleazar, and they went and reported to Bar-Kokhba: "Your friend Eleazar desires to deliver this country into the hands of Hadrian."

The Messianic king at once called for the Samaritan spy, and said to him: "What did you say to R. Eleazar?"

The Samaritan replied: "If I tell you the truth, my emperor will kill me; if I refrain from telling it to you, you will kill me; but I would rather die than disclose the secrets of my emperor."

Bar-Kokhba suspected a traitorous plot between R. Eleazar and the enemy, and he immediately summoned the rabbi to appear before him.

"Tell me what this Samaritan whispered in your ear," demanded Bar-Kokhba.

Eleazar, who had been so absorbed in his prayers that he hardly noticed the Samaritan, replied: "I do not know what he whispered in my ear, for I was then absorbed in prayer."

"And what did you say to him then?" thundered back Bar-Kokhba.

"I said nothing to him," replied the saintly rabbi.

Bar-Kokhba became enraged by the replies of R. Eleazar, for he thought that R. Eleazar was deceiving him. In his fury he kicked the rabbi. The latter, enfeebled by fasting, instantly fell dead at the feet of the Messianic king. Then a heavenly voice was heard: "Woe to the worthless shepherd that leaveth his flock! Thou hast lamed the arm of Israel and blinded his eyes; therefore shall thine arm and thine eye lose their power."

Thereupon Bethar fell into the hands of the Romans, and Bar-Kokhba was killed. One soldier brought the head of Bar-Kokhba to the Roman emperor, who inquired: "Who killed him?"

"I killed him," boasted the soldier.

"Bring his body here, so that I can examine it," ordered the emperor.

When the body of the rebel leader was brought before Hadrian, he exclaimed: "Why, his body has been crushed by a snake! Had not God's hand killed him, no human hand could have injured him."

Thereupon a fearful slaughter of the Jews of Bethar began. The number of the people slain was so great, that horses waded up to their nostrils in blood, and a crimson river flowed into the sea which was four miles distant from Bethar.

SHABUOTH (PENTECOST)

Shabuoth, Feast of Weeks, is celebrated on the sixth day of the third month, Sivan. It is called Feast of Weeks, because God commanded us to count seven weeks from the time the Omer (first ripe grain) was first brought in the Temple, on the second day of Passover, to this festival.

This holiday is the closing of the spring harvest which lasted in Palestine for seven weeks beginning with the second day of Passover. It began with the harvesting of barley on Passover and ended with the harvesting of wheat on Shabuoth. For this reason this festival is also known as the Festival of the First Ripe Fruit. On this festival, every land owner was to bring some of his first ripe fruit to Jerusalem, as a thanksgiving offering to God. To commemorate this harvest festival, we decorate our homes and synagogues with plants, flowers and trees.

Shabuoth also commemorates the fact that God, on that day when the Jews were in the wilderness, gave His people the Ten Commandments through Moses; *zeman mattan torathenu,* the time when our Law was given. This took place six weeks after the crossing of the Red Sea by the Jews.

The following stories will tell in what wonderful fashion the Ten Commandments were given to the Jews.

THE GIVING OF THE LAW

1. *Before the Revelation*

HREE months had elapsed from the time the Israelites had left Egypt, and now God thought that He would give them the Torah. Before He gave the Torah to Israel, He had offered it to every tribe and nation on the earth, so that hereafter they might not excuse themselves by saying: "Had the Holy One, blessed be He, preferred to give the Torah to us, we should have accepted it." He went to the children of Esau and said: "Will ye accept the Torah?"

"What is written in the Torah?" they asked.

"Thou shalt not kill, is one of its commandments," replied God.

"Almighty God," they said, "dost Thou desire to take from us the blessing which was given our father Esau? For he was blessed with the words, 'By thy sword shalt thou live.' We do not want to accept the Torah."

Thereupon He went to the children of Ishmael and said to them: "Will ye accept the Torah?"

"What is written therein?" the Ishmaelites asked.

"Thou shalt not steal, is one of its commandments," said God.

"We cannot accept the Torah," they said, "because our father was blessed thus: 'His hand will be against every man.'"

God then went to all the other nations and all of them rejected the Torah because the commandments found in it were contrary to their own customs. He then went to the children of Israel and said to them: "Will you accept the Torah?"

"What is written therein?" they asked.

"The Torah contains six hundred and thirteen commandments," said God.

"All that the Lord has spoken we shall do and obey," they all said as one man.

When it became known to the mountains that God intended to deliver the Torah from the top of one of them, they fought for the honor of being chosen as the spot upon which the glory of God would reveal itself. One mountain said: "Upon me shall the Holy One give His Torah to Israel." Whereupon another mountain said: "Upon me shall the Holy One give the Torah to Israel."

"Upon me shall God descend," said Mount Tabor to Mount Hermon, "because I am the highest of all, and when the flood in the time of Noah covered all the high places, I towered above the waters."

"Nay, upon me shall God descend," replied Mount Hermon, "because when the Children of

Israel wished to cross the Red Sea, I placed myself between the two shores, and enabled them to cross."

Mount Carmel said nothing, but thought that God would surely descend upon him.

"In vain do ye quarrel," rang out a voice from the high heavens, "the Divine Presence shall not rest upon any of the high mountains, who are so proud, and upon whom the heathen erect sanctuaries for their idols. I prefer Mount Sinai, the most humble of all, upon which no sanctuaries have been built by idolaters."

2. *The Pledge*

On the second day of the third month, God told Moses: "Go and acquaint the women of Israel with the laws of my Torah, and try with kindly words to persuade them to accept the Torah, so that they may help their husbands raise their children in the ways of the Torah. After that explain the contents of the Torah to the men, and with them Thou shalt speak solemn words concerning it."

Moses repeated the words of God to the people, and they said that they were willing to do whatever God commanded them. But God still hesitated to give the Torah to the children of Israel, and he said to them: "Bring Me bondsmen by whom ye will bind yourselves to observe it, and I will give you the Torah."

"Our ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, will be our bondsmen," said the Israelites.

"Your ancestors are not good bondsmen," answered God; "for Abraham said, 'Whereby shall I know that I will inherit the land?' and he did not have faith in My word. Isaac loved his son Esau, whom I hated. Jacob, when in distress said, 'My way is hidden from the Lord.' Bring good bondsmen, and I will give you the Torah."

"Then let our prophets be our bondsmen," said the Israelites.

"I object to them," said God, "for your prophets become like foxes in the desert. Bring Me good bondsmen, and I will give you the Torah."

"We will give you our children as bondsmen," said the Israelites.

"These are good bondsmen," said God; "on their bond I will give you the Torah."

The Israelites thereupon brought their wives and their babes with them to Mount Sinai, so that the little ones might become surety for the adults that they would observe the Torah.

3. *The Revelation*

On the day of the Revelation, flashes of lightning and peals of thunder filled the people with fear and trembling. There were fire and earthquake, storm and hail. The kings of the earth trembled in their palaces, and they came to the villainous Balaam and asked: "Does God intend

for us the same fate as that of the generation of the flood?"

"Oh, you fools!" said Balaam; "the Holy One, blessed be He, has long promised Noah never again to punish the world with a flood."

"Perhaps He now means to destroy the world by means of fire," said the frightened kings.

"Nay, God will not destroy the world with fire," said Balaam; "God is about to give His Torah to His chosen people, hence all this disturbance in nature."

"May the Eternal bless His people with peace," they all said, and each of them returned to his palace.

At noon, when all the Israelites had assembled, the men in one division, the women in another, God revealed Himself before the people. He lifted up the mountain and holding it over the heads of the people like a basket, said to them: "If ye will accept the Torah, it shall be well with you, otherwise ye shall all find your graves under the mountain." They all burst into tears, and again they declared: "All that the Lord has said, we will do and obey." Immediately a host of one hundred and twenty myriad angels descended from heaven, and provided every Israelite with a crown and a girdle of glory.

When God was about to utter the first word, nature stood still: the birds ceased their singing, wings became motionless, the billows of the sea

were suddenly calmed, the streams stopped flowing, the angels stopped singing hymns, there was nothing but silence, both in heaven and on earth. The voice of God was then heard saying: "I am the Lord thy God." Immediately the seven heavens and the seven earths were opened that they might serve as witnesses to the Israelites that there is none like God either in the heavens above or on the earths below. These words uttered by God Himself were heard not only by the Israelites, but by all the nations of the earth.

When the Israelites heard the voice of God, they were flung back twelve miles, and their souls fled from them. The Torah then presented itself before God, and said: "Lord of the world, hast thou given the Torah to the living or to the dead?"

"To the living," said God.

"But they are all dead," complained the Torah.

"For thy sake," said God, "I will restore them to life again." He thereupon let fall upon them the dew that will revive the dead in the time of the Messiah, and they returned to life.

4. *Moses in Heaven*

Israel heard the Ten Commandments spoken by God Himself on Mount Sinai, and they thought that God would on this occasion give them all the commandments of the Torah. But they were so much awed by the events of the day that they cared not to hear any more laws uttered by the

Almighty Himself. They therefore approached Moses and said to him: "Pray, be you the intermediator between God and us, lest we all die."

God acknowledged that their demand was just, and He said to Moses: "Go, say to them, 'Return you all to your tents,' but stay thou with Me."

When this day, the most important in human history, drew to a close, Moses ascended the holy mountain. A cloud appeared and lay down before him, but he did not know whether to hold fast to it, or to ride upon it. Then suddenly the cloud divided into two parts. Moses entered between them, and was carried away by the cloud.

Reaching heaven he found Kemuel, the angel who is in charge of twelve thousand angels of destruction, posted at the gate of heaven. He spoke to Moses harshly: "Son of Amram, how comest thou to be here, in this place, which belongs to angels of fire?"

"I come here with the permission of the Holy One to receive the Torah and bring it down to Israel," replied Moses. Kemuel still refused to let him pass, but Moses pronounced the Holy Name, and thereby cast Kemuel forth a distance of thirteen thousand parasangs.

Thereupon the cloud carried him farther on until he reached the angel Hadarniel, who shoots out twelve thousand flashes of lightning from his mouth at every word he utters. When he beheld Moses, he roared at him: "Son of Amram, how

comest thou to be here in the abode of the Holy and High?" Moses became greatly frightened, and he was unable to utter a single word. Suddenly he heard a voice saying to him: "When I appeared unto thee in the bush, thou didst speak to Me freely; now thou art afraid of but one of the angels that minister unto Me." Moses, encouraged by the word of God, pronounced the Holy Name. Hadarniel then ran before Moses, like a disciple before his master, until he reached the fire of Sandalfon. Hadarniel then said to Moses: "I can proceed no further, lest the fire of Sandalfon consume me."

When Moses beheld Sandalfon, he was frightened, and in his alarm he almost fell out of the cloud. With tears in his eyes he prayed to God for mercy, and God Himself descended from the throne of Divine Majesty and stood before Moses until he had passed the flames of Sandalfon.

Finally he came to the host of angels that surround the throne of Divine Majesty. These wanted to scorch Moses with their fiery breath, but God said to Moses: "Hold tightly to the throne of Divine Majesty and argue with them." For as soon as the angels became aware of the fact that Moses had come to heaven, they said to God: "What does he, who is born of woman, here?"

"He has come to receive the Torah," God replied.

"Why give it to the creatures of dust?" they

pleaded. "Why not give it to the angels in heaven?"

Moses thereupon answered the angels: "It is written in the Torah: 'I am the Lord thy God, that have led thee out of Egypt and out of the house of bondage.' Were ye enslaved in Egypt and then delivered, that ye are in need of the Torah? It is further written in the Torah: 'Thou shalt have no other gods before me.' Are there then any idolaters among you that ye are in need of the Torah? It is written: 'Honor thy father and thy mother.' Have ye then parents that ye are in need of the Torah? It is written: 'Thou shalt not kill'; 'thou shalt not steal.' Are there any murderers among you, or is there perchance any money in heaven that can be stolen, that you are in need of the Torah?" The angels thereupon withdrew their opposition, and acknowledged that the Torah should be given to the inhabitants of the earth, saying: "Eternal, Our Lord, how excellent is Thy name in all the earth! Thou hast set Thy glory upon the heavens."

5. *Moses Receives the Torah*

In the presence of God, Moses beheld the Torah which was written in black fire upon white fire. God was occupied in ornamenting the letters of the Torah with little crown-like decorations.

"What is the significance of the crowns upon the letters?" Moses asked of God.

"In time to come, there will live a man," replied God, "who in his wisdom will base many laws upon his interpretation of these dots upon the letters."

"If it please Thee, O Lord, show me this man," prayed Moses.

"Go back eighteen ranks," said God, "and thou shalt behold the man."

Moses went where he was told to go, and there he heard the discussions between a teacher and the many disciples who were sitting around him; but Moses was unable to follow those discussions, and this grieved him greatly. Just then he heard the disciples questioning their master: "How do you know this to be the law?" And the master answered: "This is a law given to Moses on Mount Sinai." Thereupon Moses was satisfied and pleased.

Moses returned to God and said: "Thou hast a man like Rabbi Akiba, and yet Thou dost give the Torah through me!"

"Peace," said God, "so it has been decreed by Me."

"O Lord," said Moses, "Thou hast permitted me to see the man's learning, pray let me also see the reward which is meted out to him."

"Go, return and see," said God.

Moses turned around and saw them sell the flesh of the martyr Akiba at the meat market. "Is this the reward for such learning?" asked Moses.

"Be silent, thus have I decreed," replied God.

Moses then saw God write the word "long-suffering" in the Torah, and he asked: "Does this mean that Thou art long-suffering with the righteous?"

"Nay, with sinners also am I long-suffering," answered God.

"What!" exclaimed Moses, "with sinners? Let them perish!"

"There will come a time when thou wilt withdraw thy objection," said God.

During the forty days that Moses stayed in heaven, God taught him the written law and the oral teachings, which were expounded in later generations by the Talmudists. God then bestowed the Torah upon Moses, who was ready to descend to Israel.

Satan then appeared before the Lord and said: "Where is the place where the Torah is kept?"

"I gave the Torah to the Earth," God said.

Satan immediately betook himself to the Earth, and asked: "Where is the Torah, O Earth?"

"Only God knows its abiding-place," answered the Earth.

Satan now passed on to the Sea and said: "Where is the Torah, O Sea?"

"It is not with me," said the Sea. He then went to the Abyss, but the Abyss also said: "It is not with me."

Satan next went to Destruction and Death, and

said: "Do you know where the Torah can be found?"

"We have heard the fame thereof with our ears," answered Death and Destruction, "but we know not where it is."

Satan returned to God and said: "O Lord of the world! Everywhere have I sought for the Torah, but have found it not."

"Go, seek the son of Amram," God replied.

Satan now hastened to Moses, and asked him: "Where is the Torah that God hath given thee?"

"Who am I, that the Holy One, blessed be He, should have given me the Torah?" answered Moses.

"O Moses, thou speakest falsehood," said God.

"O Lord of the world!" Moses answered. "Thou hast in Thy possession a hidden treasure which daily delights Thee. Dare I declare it my possession?"

"Thou art humble," said God. "As a reward for thy humility, the Torah shall henceforth be known as the Law of Moses."

Moses then departed from heaven with two tablets upon which the Ten Commandments were engraved. These tablets were created by God's own hand in the dusk of the first Sabbath at the close of the Creation, and were made of sapphire-like stone.

TISH'AH B'AB (NINTH OF AB)

The ninth day of the fifth month, Ab, is set aside by all Jews in all lands as a day of fasting and mourning. On this day they abstain from all pleasure and festivity, and instead spend the major part of the day in reading the Book of Lamentations and hymns.

On this very unfortunate day, the Jews lost their independence twice. Once they were exiled from their land of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, and the second time by Titus, Emperor of Rome. Jerusalem and the Temple, too, were destroyed twice on the very same day. The Temple, that had been built by King Solomon, was destroyed by the Babylonians (586 B.C.E.), and the Temple, that had been built by Herod, was destroyed by the Romans (70 C.E.).

Read the following heartrending stories telling of both destructions, and you, too, will mourn together with all the Jews for the great loss they sustained on this day. You will also learn that our forefathers were great heroes, who willingly sacrificed their lives for the sake of liberty and freedom. You will read of the desperate battles they fought in trying to remain free and independent from foreign rule.

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE FIRST TEMPLE

1. *Eating a Living Hare*

NEBUCHADNEZZAR, the king of the Babylonians, subdued Judaea and led Jehoiachin, the Judaean king, and a portion of the people into captivity. The Babylonian king then appointed Mattaniah, the only son of King Josiah, as king over Judaea, and re-named him Zedekiah.

"Now swear fealty unto me," said Nebuchadnezzar to Zedekiah, "and that you will not rebel against me."

"I will swear fealty to you by my own soul," replied Zedekiah.

"Nay, that would not satisfy me," said the Babylonian king. "I desire that you swear fealty to me by a scroll of the Law."

Zedekiah then swore fealty to Nebuchadnezzar by a scroll of the Law. The king of Judah found favor in the eyes of Nebuchadnezzar and he ordered his bodyguard to admit his vassal whenever he sought entrance to his court.

One day Zedekiah visited Nebuchadnezzar, and found him in the act of cutting a piece from a living hare and eating it, as was the custom among the barbarians. Nebuchadnezzar was painfully embarrassed, and said to the Jewish king: "Now swear to me by the Holy of Holies that you will never mention what you have seen me do."

Zedekiah swore to the Babylonian king that he would not disclose to anybody what he had seen. Thereafter the Babylonian king treated Zedekiah with great friendliness, and even made him lord over five vassal kings.

2. *Nebuchadnezzar's Auguries*

The five vassal kings one day came to Zedekiah and complained of Nebuchadnezzar's cruelty, adding: "If all were as it should be, you would occupy the throne of Nebuchadnezzar." Zedekiah then exclaimed: "O yes, that cruel Nebuchadnezzar, I once saw him eating a live hare!"

The five kings at once went to Babylonia, and reported to the king what Zedekiah had said. Nebuchadnezzar flew into a rage and thereupon determined to destroy Jerusalem and lead the inhabitants into captivity.

However, Nebuchadnezzar knew that to capture the Holy City was no easy task. He well remembered how his father-in-law Sennacherib, king of Assyria, together with his vast army met with ill-fate before the walls of Jerusalem. He

well remembered how he and only four others escaped with their lives from the great catastrophe which befell them near the walls of the Holy City. These memories inspired the Babylonian king with fear and awe.

For eighteen years Nebuchadnezzar heard daily a heavenly voice resound in his palace: "O thou wicked slave, go and destroy the house of the Lord, for His children hearken not unto Him." But Nebuchadnezzar feared to undertake the task. He then resorted to witchcraft and secret arts. He took an arrow, shot it in the direction of Rome, and said: "Let this spell the doom of Rome." But the arrow returned to him. He then shot an arrow in the direction of Alexandria, and said: "Let this spell the doom of Alexandria;" but again the arrow came back. He then shot an arrow toward Jerusalem, and he said: "Let this spell the doom of Jerusalem," and the arrow went off directly toward the Holy City.

The Babylonian king then planted some seeds and set up some plants, and said: "Let these signify the defeat of Rome and Alexandria at my hands," but the seeds did not sprout nor did the plants flourish. He again planted seeds and set up plants, and he said: "Let these signify the defeat of Jerusalem at my hands," and no sooner had he uttered these words than the seeds sprouted and the plants began to grow.

Nebuchadnezzar finally lighted candles and

lanterns, and he said: "Let these lights be symbolic of my victories over Rome and Alexandria," but the candles and lanterns refused to burn. He then lighted the same candles and lanterns, and said: "Let these lights be symbolic of my victories over Jerusalem," and sure enough the lights shone brilliantly.

Even with all these signs, the Babylonian king dared not lead his army against the Holy City in person. He entrusted the command of the army to his general Nebuzaradan, who laid siege against Jerusalem for three years.

3. *The Prophet Jeremiah*

When Jeremiah was a lad, he received the call from God to be a prophet in Israel. Jeremiah refused to accept the mission, pleading: "O Lord, I cannot go as a prophet to Israel, for there has never lived a prophet among them whom they have not desired to kill. They sought to stone Moses and Aaron; they mocked at Elijah, the Tishbite, because his hair was grown long; and they called after Elisha, 'Go up, thou bald-head.' How then can I go and prophesy in Israel, when I am nought but a lad?"

"I love youth, for it is innocent," replied God. "When I brought Israel out from the land of Egypt, I called him a lad, and when I think of Israel lovingly, I speak of him as a lad. Say not, therefore, thou art only a lad, but go on whatso-

ever errand I send thee. Now, then, take the 'cup of wrath,' and let the nations drink from it."

"Which land is to drink first from this cup?" asked Jeremiah.

"The head of all earthly nations, Jerusalem, is to drink first," replied God, "then the other cities of Judah."

"Cursed be the day of my birth!" exclaimed the youthful prophet. "O Mother Zion, when I was called to prophesy, I thought that I was appointed to proclaim prosperity and salvation for thee, but now I see that my message is to forebode thy doom."

Jeremiah first appeared in public to prophesy during the reign of Josiah, when he announced to the people in the streets: "If ye will give up your wicked acts, God will raise you above all the nations; if not, He will deliver His house into the hands of the enemies, and they will deal with it as seemeth best to them."

During the reign of Zedekiah, the prophet was hated by both the people and the court. The people and the court favored an alliance with Egypt against Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king, and Jeremiah favored peace with Nebuchadnezzar.

Hananiah, one of the false prophets attached to the court of King Zedekiah, was an enemy of Jeremiah, and he prophesied that the children of Israel would have a complete victory over the

Babylonian king within two years. Jeremiah prophesied just the reverse, that the Babylonian king would be victorious, and that the Jewish state would suffer total destruction, unless the Jews repented of their evil ways.

"Give us a sign that you are prophesying the truth," demanded Hananiah.

"Why trouble yourself about the future in store for others," said Jeremiah; "think rather of your own future, for this very year you shall die."

Hananiah died on the very last day of the year, but before his death he said to his son Shelemiah: "My son, when I die, my death is to be kept secret for two days, so that we may give the lie to the prophecy of Jeremiah. I charge you to seek every possible opportunity of taking revenge upon Jeremiah for it is because of his curse that I suffer death."

Shelemiah had no opportunity during his lifetime to fulfill his father's last request. And when he lay upon his deathbed, he said to his son Jeriah: "My son, remember the last wish of your grandfather and mine, to seek every occasion of taking revenge upon the prophet Jeremiah."

One day, during the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, Jeremiah wished to leave the city in order to go to Anathoth, his native place, and partake of the priestly portion there. The watchman at the gate, who was none other than Jeriah, the grandson of the false prophet Hananiah, accused

Jeremiah of desiring to betray the Judaeans to the enemy. Jeriah hastened to the court, and there brought charges of treason against the prophet. The aristocratic enemies of Jeremiah welcomed this trumped-up charge, and put Jeremiah behind prison bars. They put him in the charge of a jailer named Jonathan, who had been a friend of the false prophet Hananiah. Jonathan took delight in mocking the prisoner daily with the remark: "See, what honor your friend bestows upon you, to put you in so fine a prison as this; verily, it is a royal palace."

Once King Zedekiah visited Jeremiah in prison and inquired: "Do you have any revelation from God concerning me?"

"Yes," replied the prophet, "the king of Babylonia will carry you off into captivity. Now," continued the prophet, "even wicked men, like Hananiah and his descendants, look for a pretext when they desire to take vengeance. You who are called Zedekiah, 'just man,' should at least follow their example, and not put me in prison for no cause whatsoever."

King Zedekiah, moved by the petition of the prophet, ordered him to be released from prison, but the prophet did not enjoy his liberty for long. Jeremiah again advised the people to surrender to the Babylonian king. The nobility seized him and cast him into a lime-pit filled with water. They hoped that the prophet would drown there,

but God commanded the water in the lime-pit, saying: "Sink thou to the bottom of the pit, and let the mud at the bottom rise to the top so that it may support my faithful Jeremiah." Immediately the water sank to the bottom and the mud rose to the surface, and supported the prophet above the water.

While Jeremiah was in the pit, Jonathan, the former jailer of Jeremiah, availed himself of the opportunity to mock the prophet. He would come daily to the edge of the lime-pit and call down jeeringly: "O you true prophet of God, do but rest your head a little on the mud, and take a little sleep." Jeremiah would remain silent and would make no reply to such sneers.

In the court of King Zedekiah there was but one pious man, whose name was Ebed-Melech. He appeared before the king and said: "O Sire, if Jeremiah perishes in the lime-pit, Jerusalem will surely be captured by the enemy, for it is on account of his great merits that Jerusalem had been saved until now."

"You have my permission to save the prophet," said the king.

Ebed-Melech hastened to the pit, and cried out aloud several times, "O my lord Jeremiah," but no answer came from the pit. The prophet thought that it was his former jailer Jonathan, and therefore made no reply to the call of Ebed-Melech.

"Woe to me!" cried out Ebed-Melech, "the

prophet is dead! He must have perished in the lime-pit."

Jeremiah, realizing that it was a friend, and not Jonathan, asked: "Who is it that is calling my name and is concerned about my safety?"

"It is I, Ebed-Melech, who has come hither to save you from the lime-pit," came the reassuring reply. Thus was Jeremiah saved from the lime-pit.

4. *Pangs of Hunger*

For three years was Jerusalem besieged by the enemy. The suffering of the people of Jerusalem increased daily. They ran short of water and food, and thousands died from starvation and drought.

One day the inhabitants of Jerusalem filled a casket with pure gold, and let it down by a rope from the walls of the city with a note to the Babylonians, saying: "Take you all this gold for yourselves, and send us in its stead some food." The Babylonian soldiers emptied the casket and filled it with wheat. The following day the casket was again let down, filled with gold, and the Babylonians filled it with barley. The third day, the procedure was repeated, and the Babylonians filled the casket with straw. On the fourth day, a casket full of gold was let down again, but the Babylonians sent it back empty.

Once a very wealthy woman said to her husband: "Pick out one of my jewels or precious stones, go through the streets of Jerusalem, and

see if you cannot find somebody to give you a morsel of bread for it." For hours and hours the husband walked through the streets of Jerusalem, and whomever he met he offered to give a precious stone in exchange for a morsel of bread, but there was no bread to be gotten. Exhausted with hunger and fatigue, the husband fell dead in the street.

"I am very much worried about your father," said the mother to her only son. "Pray go out and look for him."

The son was very much weakened from lack of food, but he went out to look for his father, and after a long search he found his dead body lying in the mud of the streets. "Oh, would that I had died in your stead, my dear father!" exclaimed the son. He prostrated himself upon the corpse of his father, embraced it, and there he too breathed his last.

5. *Jerusalem Captured*

In spite of their terrible sufferings, the inhabitants of Jerusalem refused to surrender to the Babylonian king, for they hoped that the Egyptian king, with whom they had formed an alliance against the Babylonians, would ultimately come to their aid. In fact the hosts of the Egyptian king, Pharaoh Necho, had actually set forth from Egypt to join the Jews against Babylon. But when the Egyptians were on the high seas, God said to the waters of the sea: "Cast up the corpses

of the Egyptians that have been drowned in the Red Sea, and let them float on the surface, so that the Egyptian hosts may see them."

Immediately the surface of the sea was covered with dead bodies, and the Egyptians, astonished at this strange occurrence, asked one another: "Whence do these dead bodies come?"

Thereupon the councillors of Pharaoh said: "These are the corpses of our forefathers who were drowned in the Red Sea on account of the Jews, when the latter had shaken off the Egyptian yoke. Now they have floated to the top of the waters to protest against our going to bring aid to their enemies."

"What!" cried out all the Egyptians as one man, "shall we bring help to those who drowned our ancestors?" So they returned to their country, and left Israel to his own fate.

Although the Jews waited in vain for outside help, they did not lose courage. They fought like lions at bay. Neither hunger, thirst, nor suffering daunted them. There were many, many heroes in the beleaguered city, but one of the most notable was Abika. He, together with a few other heroes, mounted the walls of the city and defended it against the onslaught of the Babylonians. The enemy directed their main attack against Abika and his men, but Abika would catch the arrows that were shot at him in his hands, and would throw them back into the enemy's camp with such

great force that they killed those they struck. With his powerful feet he would stop the stones that were hurled by the enemy at the walls of the city, and would throw them back upon the besiegers, causing a great loss of life among them. But it was the will of God that Jerusalem be captured, and human strength and heroism amounted to naught. A sudden gust of wind swept Abika from the wall, and he died.

There were scarcely any defenders left on the walls of the city, nevertheless the Babylonians were unable to capture it. There was one man in Jerusalem whose good deeds were like a pillar for the city, and whose prayers to God were like a stony wall, and this was no other than the Prophet Jeremiah. As long as he remained within the walls of the city, it could not be captured.

One day, God said to Jeremiah: "Go to thy native place, Anathoth, and take possession of a field, which is thine by right of inheritance."

Jeremiah took this message as a sign that God would be gracious to Judah. "For," said he, "if God is really to destroy His city and exile His people, He would not command me to take possession of a piece of land."

As soon as Jeremiah left Jerusalem, an angel appeared on the wall of the city, and cried out: "Let the enemy come and enter the house, for it is forsaken by its Master. The enemy has permission to destroy it, for the Watchman has gone

away and abandoned it. But let no man boast and say, that he and his army have conquered the city. Nay, a vanquished city have you conquered, a dead people have you killed."

Thereupon Nebuzaradan the commander of the Babylonian army distributed among his warriors three hundred camel-loads of sharp axes, which had been sent to him by Nebuchadnezzar. "Now," he commanded, "rush to the city and with these make a breach in its wall so that we can enter." The Babylonian warriors rushed to the wall of Jerusalem and struck it with their sharp axes, but to their great amazement, the axes were swallowed up by the wall, and no breach appeared in it. On seeing this, the commander was about to give up the attack and raise the siege of the city, and return to his own country, when one of his soldiers approached him and said: "There is a single axe left in my possession; the soldiers have not succeeded in their attempt to make a breach in the wall of the city; now, you take this axe, and try your luck; perhaps you will be able to do more than all of us combined." Nebuzaradan took the axe, and with a single blow he caused a breach in the wall. Immediately, the entire wall was swallowed up by the earth.

6. *The Flight and Capture of Zedekiah*

In the palace of King Zedekiah, there was a secret passage and cave which extended from the

palace at Jerusalem to the city of Jericho. When Zedekiah was informed that the enemy had broken into the city, he took his ten sons and made his escape through the cave. The soldiers of the enemy who were ordered to capture the Jewish king alive, made search for him in every nook and corner of the palace, but in vain. He was nowhere to be found.

Now Jeremiah had once prophesied to King Zedekiah: "You shall be in exile until the day of your death, but you shall never behold the land of your exile with your eyes." When therefore he was in the cave, the king thought that he would escape the doom prophesied for him, because, once in Jericho, he would have no cause to fear the Babylonian soldiers. But the contrivances of man are of no avail against the will of God.

The soldiers who were unable to find Zedekiah, left the city with the idea of making a search for him in the suburbs of Jerusalem, when God sent a deer into their path. They abandoned the search and pursued the game. Skilled as they were in the art of hunting, they could not, to their great surprise, catch this deer. They continued the pursuit until they reached the opening of a cave near Jericho. Now this was the farther opening of the secret passage and just at that moment Zedekiah and his ten sons happened to be emerging from the cave. The Jewish king and his sons were brought before Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon,

Nebuchadnezzar said: "You have forfeited your life for having broken your oath to me."

"O sire," pleaded the captive king, "pray grant me this one wish, and take my life before you take the lives of my sons, that I may be spared the sight of their blood."

"O sire," pleaded the ten princes, "nay, take our lives first, that we may be spared the disgrace of seeing our royal father executed."

But the heartless Nebuchadnezzar, who had decided upon worse things than Zedekiah surmised, made no reply to their pleas. "Deprive this rebellious king of his eyesight," was the command given by Nebuchadnezzar to his attendants. The attendants forced iron lances into the eyes of the Jewish king, but his eyes were not blinded, for they were endowed with superhuman strength. They then forced sharp spears into his wounded eyes, but they were not able to destroy his eyesight.

"Slaughter the ten princes in sight of their father!" ordered the infuriated Nebuchadnezzar.

One by one the ten princes were cruelly slaughtered in sight of their father, and this had the desired effect. The bitter tears shed by the father over the fate of his sons deprived him of his vision. Blind and humiliated, the Jewish king was carried captive to Babylonia, yet he did not see the land of his exile, as Jeremiah had foretold.

7. *The Seething Blood*

When Nebuzaradan forced his way into the Temple, he found the priests engaged in the service, and the Levites singing Psalms and playing their harps. "Cease all these ceremonies," ordered the commander of the Babylonians, "or you shall all meet with a horrible death." The singing immediately stopped, and Nebuzaradan, looking about in the Temple, cried out in great astonishment: "What is the meaning of this blood seething on the floor of the Temple?"

"It is nothing but the blood of the sacrifices we offer to God," replied the terrified priests.

"I can distinguish human blood from that of oxen," said the Babylonian commander. "Murder has been committed in this very holy place of yours. Now, slaughter oxen in this very spot, and see if the blood will cease seething." A great number of oxen were slaughtered and their blood mingled with the blood on the floor of the Temple, but it never stopped seething.

"Now, you must disclose the truth," said the commander, "if not, you shall suffer death by horrible torture."

The horror-stricken priests then narrated the truth: "There once lived among us a prophet of God whose name was Zechariah. He prophesied in the name of God that the Temple would be

destroyed if the Jews continued to do evil. For his candor, he was slain by the people in the Temple, his blood was shed on this very spot, and since then it has not stopped seething."

"I, I will stop the seething of the blood," said the haughty commander. He then ordered that all the Sanhedrin and the learned men be slaughtered on the bloody spot, but the blood of the prophet did not stop seething. He then massacred eighty thousand young priests at the spot where the blood was seething, but still it kept on seething. Thousands of school children were killed on the bloody spot, but the blood of Zechariah still seethed. Finally, Nebuzaradan exclaimed: "Zechariah, Zechariah, the best in Israel have I slaughtered for your sake. Do you desire that I destroy all the people?" Only then did the blood of the Prophet stop seething, and the earth opened and swallowed it.

This incident startled the heartless Nebuzaradan. "For," he said, "if the Jews have been punished so cruelly for having taken the life of a single man, what then shall be my fate, who have killed people by the thousands!"

8. *The Temple Destroyed*

Nebuzaradan and his officers were assembled on the Temple mount, and, on the very spot whereon King Solomon was in the habit of sitting when he

took counsel with the elders, the Babylonians plotted to reduce the Temple to ashes.

While the Babylonians were deliberating, an angel appeared before the throne of Divine Majesty and said: "O Lord, six years ago Thou commandedst me to procure burning coals of fire wherewith the Temple would be reduced to ashes. I thereupon went to the Cherub to whom I said: 'The Lord hath commanded me to fetch coals from thy dominion, but I fear lest I be consumed by thy great fire, therefore I request of thee that thou fetch unto me some of thy burning coals.' All these years, the coals have been in my possession, and I had hoped that the children of Israel would repent of their evil ways, but in vain. Now, O Lord, permit me to set fire to Thy Temple."

"They that trust Me have not entirely disappeared from the midst of Israel," replied God; "therefore, put not forth thy hand against My Temple."

The host of angels rejoiced over the decision of God, but Justice appeared at that moment and said: "Why, O Lord, shall the heathens boast and say, 'We have reduced to ashes the house of the great and holy God of Israel'? Let a fire come down from heaven and reduce Thy Temple to ashes."

Then four angels, each with a flaming torch in his hand, descended from heaven, and set fire to

the four corners of the Temple. Thereupon the Temple rose heavenward, but God addressed it with these words: "My house, it is My decree that thy glory be reduced this day. Descend to earth and a fire will consume thee, but a time will come when I will rebuild thee with fire, and thou wilt then be everlasting."

The high priest, when he saw the flames shoot up, cast the keys of the Temple heavenward, saying: "Here are the keys of Thy house; it seems I am an unworthy custodian." And as he turned he was seized by the Babylonians and slaughtered, and his daughter, too, perished at their hands, her blood mingling with that of her father. The priests and the Levites threw their harps and trumpets into the flames and then they themselves followed, and the virgins who wove the curtains for the sanctuary likewise flung themselves into the fire.

When the flames of the burning Temple shot heavenward, the angels said to one another: "Come, let us descend and comfort the holy city, Jerusalem."

God said: "Will ye comfort the ruined city and not its Builder? Should one comfort the dead son and not the father who mourns for him? But I will not interfere with you. Go down and comfort Jerusalem."

The angels descended and spoke comforting words to Jerusalem, but she refused to be com-

forted. God Himself then descended to comfort the Holy City. He said: "Thy dwellers, O Jerusalem, disobeyed My commandments; they failed to honor their parents; they were guilty of slander and bloodshed, and they took My Name in vain."

Abashed at this rebuke, Jerusalem stopped complaining, but said: "Even when my children are away from me, they will not forget Thee, O Lord; therefore, do not, I pray Thee, forget them and abandon them in their exile."

"I will be their helper and redeemer," God assured the bereaved city.

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE SECOND TEMPLE

1. *Kamza and Bar Kamza*

N Jerusalem there lived a man who had a friend named Kamza and an enemy named Bar Kamza. Once this man made a banquet, and he ordered his servant to go and invite his friends to the banquet. Among the guests to be invited, his friend Kamza was included. The servant by mistake invited Bar Kamza, his master's enemy, instead of Kamza, his friend.

Bar Kamza came to the banquet. The master of the house was surprised to find his enemy Bar Kamza among the guests, and turning to him, said: "You are my enemy, and what are you doing here? Away with you at once!"

"Since I came," pleaded Bar Kamza, "do not insult me publicly. Permit me to stay here, and I will pay you for whatever I eat and drink."

"No, I will not consent to that," insisted the master of the house. "Away with you!"

"I am willing to pay half the cost of the ban-

quet," pleaded Bar Kamza, "but do not insult me and let me stay here."

"I will not consent to that either," said the master of the house.

"Then I will pay you the costs of the whole banquet," pleaded Bar Kamza again.

"Nothing shall avail you," stated the obstinate host, and so saying he seized hold of Bar Kamza and violently led him out of the house.

Smarting from this terrible insult, Bar Kamza thought to himself: "The sages were present when these insults have been heaped upon me, yet they did not interfere. It is evident then that they have been pleased with what had happened. I will therefore take my revenge on all of them."

He accordingly went to Rome, and, gaining admittance into the palace of Nero, he slandered the Israelites, saying: "O sire, the Jews have rebelled against you."

"Where is your proof of that?" asked the Roman emperor.

"O sire, just send an offering to Jerusalem, and order that the high priest offer it for you," said Bar Kamza. "Then you will see that the Jews will refuse to obey your command."

"Go and get a young calf, without blemish, and bring it to the high priest," commanded Nero. "And let us see if my will be done."

Bar Kamza took the calf, and on the way he made a blemish on the calf so that it became unfit

to be sacrificed. He made a deep cut on the upper lip of the calf. Such a blemish makes the animal unfit for a sacrifice according to the Jewish law, but not according to the Roman usage. When the traitor brought the calf to Jerusalem and told the sages of the wish of the emperor, the sages were about to permit the offering up of the calf, in order not to arouse the fury of the Roman government.

R. Zechariah ben Eucolus, one of the sages, then rose to his feet and protested: "We shall mislead the people by doing this, for they will say that we permitted animals with blemishes to be sacrificed."

The people then wanted to kill Bar Kamza so that he might not go and report to Nero that the Judæans refused to sacrifice his offering. But R. Zechariah ben Eucolus rose to his feet again and interfered, saying: "We shall mislead future generations by this act, for they will think that whoever makes a blemish on sacrifices is punishable with death."

Bar Kamza immediately returned to Rome and informed the emperor that the Jews had refused to sacrifice the lamb he had sent to them. Nero at once proceeded with his army against Jerusalem. When he reached the environs of the Jewish capital city, he decided to find out if he would be successful against the rebels. Like all the people in those days, he believed in signs. He shot an arrow eastward, and the arrow fell toward Jerusalem.

He shot an arrow westward, and it fell toward Jerusalem. He then shot an arrow northward and then southward, and each time it fell toward the direction of Jerusalem.

The Roman emperor saw a little boy pass by, and he said to him: "Recite the Biblical verse that you recently learned in school."

The frightened lad said: "I have recently learned this verse at school: 'And I will lay my vengeance upon Edom by the hand of My people Israel.' "

"The Holy One, blessed be He, is desirous to destroy His house," said Nero, "and He wants me to bear the blame, so that I be punished for it." He abandoned his army, ran away and accepted the Jewish faith. From him descended the illustrious scholar Rabbi Meir. Thereupon Vespasian took control of the Roman army, and he laid siege against Jerusalem.

2. *Nakdimon ben Gorion*

During the siege there lived in Jerusalem a very pious and wealthy man, Nakdimon ben Gorion. Before the siege, it once happened that there was a great drought in Jerusalem. Pilgrims from all over the country had come to celebrate a festival in Jerusalem, and there was not sufficient water for the vast masses that had gathered there. The people suffered very much from the drought, and there was no help in sight.

Nakdimon went to one of the Roman officers who dwelt in Jerusalem and said to him: "Permit the people that have gathered in the city to use twelve of your cisterns, and I shall return to you twelve cisterns of water within the next three days."

"But supposing the drought continues for three more days," argued the general, "how will you then repay me for my water."

"Well," said Nakdimon, "if I am unable to repay you with water, I shall pay a talent of silver for each and every cistern out of which the people drink."

The bargain agreed upon, Nakdimon announced to the much-suffering people that they can go to the premises of the Roman general and drink the water out of twelve of his cisterns. The poeple were very grateful to the pious Nakdimon for the relief he had brought about to the pilgrims, and mentioned his name with great respect and reverence.

Two days passed, and on the third day, the general rose early in the morning, and anxiously and carefully examined the skies. "There is not a cloud in sight," exclaimed the general with great satisfaction. "Now, Nakdimon will have to pay me with silver and not with water. I shall become wealthy after this."

The happy general waited a few hours, and then he sent a messenger to Nakdimon with the

message: "You can see for yourself, Nakdimon, that there will be no more rain to-day, for there is not a sign of cloud to be seen anywheres. So you might just as well pay me the twelve talents of silver right now."

"I have a great deal of time yet left of the day," sent Nakdimon word back to the general.

At noon, the Roman general again sent a message to Nakdimon, and the latter again sent back the same answer. In the afternoon the general once again sent a message to Nakdimon: "The three days have almost passed. Now you must return to me either twelve cisterns of water, or pay me twelve talents of silver."

"There is still some time left," was the message sent back by Nakdimon.

The general chuckled upon receiving this message, saying: "For a whole year no rain has come down, and now rain will descend from the clear skies in the few minutes of the day that are still left." Certain of his success, the general went to bathe in one of the bath-houses.

While the general was in the bath-house, Nakdimon, with a sad heart, went to the Temple, and he prayed thus: "Master of the world, it is known to Thee that I have done this neither to add glory to myself or to my ancestry. I have done it for the sake of Thy holy Name so that they who came to celebrate Thy festival may not suffer from want of water."

No sooner had Nakdimon concluded his prayer

than heavy clouds covered the heavens and rain descended in such great abundance that it filled all the wells to overflowing. As Nakdimon left the Temple, he met the general who had come out from the bath-house, and the former said to the latter: "Now you will have to pay me for the surplus water you obtained in your wells."

"I well know that your God made the world tremble just for your sake," answered the general. "Nevertheless, an opportunity is still left open to me to claim that you must pay me the twelve talents of silver, for the sun had already gone down, and the water descended after the time limit set by us."

Nakdimon made no reply to the general. He returned to the Temple and again prayed: "Master of the world! Make it known to Thy creatures that Thou hast some people in Thy world whom Thou lovest. As Thou hast performed a miracle for me before, perform another one for me now."

Immediately strong winds dispersed the clouds, and the sun shone in all its brightness. And the disappointed general said to Nakdimon: "Were it not for the fact that the sun came out again, I would have collected the twelve talents of silver from you."

3. *The Provisions Destroyed*

Now, this very wealthy and pious man, Nakdimon ben Gorion, and two other very wealthy

men, Ben Kalba S'bua, and Ben Tsitsith Hakkeseth, said that they would supply all the inhabitants with the most essential things during the Roman siege. One said that he would supply the whole population with wheat and barley. The second man said that he would supply the whole population with wine, salt and oil. The third man said that he would supply all the inhabitants of the besieged city with wood.

These three wealthy and generous men then opened their storehouses. An inventory was taken of all that was contained in those storehouses, and the people estimated that there were sufficient supplies for all the inhabitants of Jerusalem for a period of twenty-one years.

In Jerusalem there was a war-party who would not yield to the Romans. They insisted that Judæa be freed from the Roman rule and become an independent country once more. But the sages who saw that it was impossible for the Jews to fight the mighty Roman army, said to the leaders of the war-party: "Let us open the gates of the city and make peace with the Romans."

"That cannot be," replied the leaders of the rebels. "We shall never surrender."

Then the leaders of the war-party said to the sages: "Let us open the gates of the city and sally forth to fight the Romans in open war."

"We shall suffer certain defeat," replied the sages. "Why then make such a futile attempt?"

The leaders of the war-party, in their anxiety to go out and fight the Romans, destroyed all the storehouses containing food, including the storehouses of the three wealthy persons. There was then a great scarcity of food in Jerusalem, and the inhabitants suffered the pangs of hunger. The wealthiest people of the besieged city could obtain no food at any price.

Martha, the daughter of Boethus, was the richest woman in Jerusalem. During the siege, when food became scarce, she sent one of her slaves to buy fine flour for her. But by the time he came there, all the fine flour had been sold. He came back and said: "Mistress, there is no more fine flour to be gotten anywheres. But bread baked of fine flour can be obtained."

"Go and get me bread of fine flour," Martha said to the slave.

By the time he got there, the bread of fine flour had been sold. He returned to his mistress and reported: "Mistress, there is no more bread of fine flour to be had, but bread of coarse flour can be bought."

"Go and get me black bread," said Martha.

By the time the slave got there, the black bread too had been sold. He came back to his mistress and said: "There is no more black bread to be gotten; all that there is left is barley flour."

By the time the slave got there, the barley flour too had been sold, and he came back and reported:

"Alas, even the barley flour is gone, and there is nothing else left to be bought."

Martha took off her shoes and said: "I will go out in the street myself, maybe I will be able to get something to eat." On her way to the store, some ordure clung to her feet, and she died.

4. *R. Johanan ben Zakkai*

At that time there lived in Jerusalem a disciple of Hillel, whose name was R. Johanan ben Zakkai. This sage was at the head of the peace-party. He was for making peace with Rome, for he knew that the army of the Jews could not fight the more numerous and powerful Romans.

One day, as R. Johanan walked out into the market-place, he noticed people boiling straw and drinking the water from that. "Alas," exclaimed the grieved Rabbi; "will people who boil straw and drink the water therefrom be able to withstand the attack of the mighty armies of Vespasian? There is no other alternative for me but to leave the besieged city."

Abba Sikra ben Battiah, one of the main leaders of the war-party in Jerusalem, was a nephew of R. Johanan. That day R. Johanan sent word to Abba Sikra: "Pay me a visit secretly."

When Abba Sikra came, R. Johanan said to him: "How long will the terrorists be so obdurate and thus kill all the inhabitants of the city with famine?"

"I am helpless," answered the leader of the rebels; "for should I utter one word in favor of surrender and peace, I would be killed by the leaders of the war party."

"If you are unable to do anything yourself, then find a way for me to get out of the city," pleaded the venerable sage. "Maybe I will be able to bring some salvation to the suffering people."

"We have made up between us," said Abba Sikra, "that no human being can get through the gates of the city, unless he be dead."

"Carry me out then as a dead man," pleaded R. Johanan.

"Pretend that you are sick," said Abba Sikra, "and when everybody will come to visit you, let them put some decayed matter in your bed. The visitors will then proclaim: 'R. Johanan is dead!' Apprise your disciples of your scheme, and let them carry you out of the city. Let no stranger be permitted to carry you, lest they feel that your body is too light for a corpse."

R. Johanan followed the advice of the rebel leader. When the rumor was spread that R. Johanan had died, a few of his disciples carried the coffin containing R. Johanan. They marched all day carrying the coffin, and they reached the gates of the city at sunset. "Who is this?" shouted out the gate-keepers.

"It is a corpse," said the bearers of the coffin. "Are you not familiar with the rule that no dead

person may be left in the city of Jerusalem over night?"

The rebels were about to stab through the body with their spears, but Abba Sikra said to them: "Why arouse the indignation of the people, for they will say: 'The rebels have stabbed their great teacher.'"

The rebels then wanted to thrust him down, but Abba Sikra said to them: "You will arouse the anger of the people, for they will say: 'The rebels have thrust their great master down.'"

The gate-keepers finally opened the gate, and permitted the coffin to be carried out. The disciples carried the coffin until they reached the Roman camp. When they obtained permission to see Vespasian, the general of the Roman army, they opened the lid of the coffin, and out came the living R. Johanan ben Zakkai.

"Peace be unto you, O king! Peace be unto you, O king!" cried out the venerable sage to the Roman general.

"You deserve death twice," said the somewhat surprised and flattered general. "First, because you called me king, and I am no king; second, if I am a king, why did you fail to come to me until now?"

"I am convinced that you are a king, O sire," said R. Johanan; "for had you not been a king, Jerusalem would not have been delivered into your hands. And the reason I have not come to you

till this day is because the war-party would not let me."

Said Vespasian to R. Johanan: "If there is a barrel full of wine, and a serpent is wound around the barrel, would not one break the barrel because of the serpent?"

R. Johanan remained silent. Commenting on this in later times, R. Akiba remarked: "Rabbi Johanan should have replied to Vespasian thus: 'When a serpent is wound around a barrel of wine, we remove the serpent with a pair of tongs, kill it, and we save the barrel of wine."

At the very moment R. Johanan was conversing with Vespasian, a herald came to the Roman commander with the following message: "The Roman emperor is no more, and the Senate has appointed you emperor."

Elated over the good news, Vespasian said to R. Johanan: "Your prophecy has come true. Tell me what is your wish, and I shall fulfill it, for I must leave at once and appoint some one else to take charge of the army in my stead."

"My only wish is," said the venerable sage, "that you spare Jabneh and her scholars."

5. *Titus and the Gnat*

Vespasian put his son Titus in full charge of the Roman army. The siege against Jerusalem lasted for three years. At last the city was taken by the Romans, and in spite of the heroic deeds of

the Jews, the Temple was not spared. The Romans, unable to break the walls that surrounded the Temple mount, had to resort to some other means of attack. One of the soldiers cast a burning torch into the Temple, which immediately burst into flames. But Titus ordered that the fire be extinguished.

Titus then entered the Holy of Holies, and blasphemed the Almighty. He spread a Scroll of the Law and desecrated it. With his sword he cut into the curtain of the Ark. A miracle occurred at that moment, and blood bubbled forth, whereupon the haughty Titus laughed and said: "I killed the God of the Jews."

The proud general took the curtain, shaped it like a net, and in it he placed all the vessels of the Temple. He then boarded a vessel to return to Rome with his trophies, but a gale in the sea threatened to drown the vessel. The haughty Titus said: "It would seem that the strength of the God of this people lies only in the waters. Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, He drowned in the waters; Sisera, the mighty general, He drowned by means of water, and me too He now desires to drown in the water. If He is a hero, let Him come up to dry land and there engage in battle with me!"

Thereupon a heavenly voice was heard: "O thou wicked son of the wicked, and great-grandson of Esau the wicked! I have an unimportant crea-

ture in my world, and 'gnat' it is called. Go on dry land and engage in combat with it."

When the fleet of Titus touched land, a gnat entered his nose. This small creature bored his brain for seven years, causing him unspeakable pain.

One day Titus happened to pass by the door of a blacksmith. At the sound of the hammer, the gnat became quiet. "Now I have found a remedy for that!" exclaimed Titus. Every day a blacksmith came and continually beat with a hammer to silence the gnat. If the blacksmith was a heathen, Titus would pay him four zuzim per day, but if the blacksmith happened to be a Jew, Titus would pay him nothing for his work, explaining: "You have sufficient reward for your work, when you see your arch-enemy suffer thus." This remedy was effective for only thirty days. After that the gnat became used to the hammering, and did not heed it any longer.

When Titus was about to die, he said: "Burn my corpse, and scatter the ashes of it upon the seven seas, so that the God of the Jews shall be unable to find me and put me on trial for my cruel deeds."

When Titus died, his head was opened, and in the skull was found a gnat as large as a free-bird, the beak of which was of copper and its talons of iron.

ROSH HASHANAH (NEW YEAR)

"In the seventh month on the first day of the month, shall ye have a Sabbath, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, an holy convocation." (Lev. xxiii, 24).

Rosh Hashanah is a solemn festival. It marks the beginning of our New Year, but we do not celebrate it by attending New Year's parties and indulging in wine-drinking. We consider it as a day of reckoning both with our God and our fellow-man. On this day we must begin to repent for all the evil we have done in the past year, and take it upon ourselves to improve in the future.

On that day the Almighty sits as judge in the heavens above and records, so to say, the sins of man. All destinies of mankind, individual and national are recorded in heaven for the ensuing year, in the Books of Life and Death. At once the righteous are inscribed for life, the wicked are sentenced to death, and the indifferent are given ten days' time to repent.

This high holiday is known as the Day of Remembrance. We spend one-half of the day in praying to God, and we blow the Shofar, the horn of a ram, several times during the services. The following very interesting story will tell why the Shofar is blown, and what it reminds us of.

ABRAHAM'S TEMPTATION

1. *God's Command*

NE day the angels came to present themselves before God, and Satan was among them.

"Whence comest thou?" inquired God of Satan.

"From my wanderings up and down the earth," answered Satan.

"And what hast thou to say concerning my faithful servant Abraham?" asked God.

Satan now saw a chance of repeating his charge against Abraham, and said: "Abraham remembered Thee and served Thee only when he required something from Thee, but now he has forsaken Thee. When he had no children, he served Thee and erected altars to Thee wherever he came, and he proclaimed Thy name continually to all the children of the earth. But now that Thou hast given him whatever he had desired, hast made his name great and a blessing in the mouth of all the people that inhabit the earth, and hast even given him a son in his old age, he has forgotten Thee. On the day his son was born, and also on the day

he was weaned, he made a great feast for all the inhabitants in the land, and he did not offer to Thee as much as a turtle-dove or a pigeon."

"There is none so just, so righteous, and so true to Me as My servant Abraham," said God. "And were I even to ask him to sacrifice his only son Isaac to Me as a burnt-offering, he would not withhold him from Me."

"Speak now to Abraham as Thou hast said," said Satan, "and Thou wilt see whether he will heed Thy words."

God decided to try Abraham and Isaac, and He said to Abraham: "Take now thy son."

"I have two sons," said Abraham, "and I don't know which one to take."

"Take thy only son," said God.

"The one is the only son of his mother, and the other is the only son of *his* mother," said Abraham.

"Take then the son that thou lovest," said God.

"I love them both," said Abraham.

"Take thy son Isaac," said God, "and offer him to Me as a burnt offering, on one of the mountains which I will show thee."

"What shall I do?" thought Abraham to himself. "How shall I separate Isaac from his mother Sarah? If I tell her what God has told me, she will die of great anxiety and sorrow. If I take him away stealthily from her, so that she may not know whither he is gone, she may kill herself. The only thing left for me to do is to devise a plan

and take Isaac away from the house with her consent."

"Go to the market-place," Abraham said to Sarah, on the following morning, "and buy the best food and drink you can get, for we have a holiday to-day."

"What holiday is there to-day," inquired Sarah, "that you tell us to be merry and joyful?"

"Why should we not rejoice," said Abraham, "when God was very kind to us, and gave us a son in our old age?"

In the middle of the feast, Abraham said to his wife: "Sarah, do you know that Isaac has already reached the age of thirty-seven? When I was only three years old, I already acknowledged the existence of the God in heaven, and our son Isaac is grown up and has not yet learned to know God. I know of a certain place where lads are taught to know God. Let me take Isaac there so that he may learn to fear the Almighty God, and to be kind to all his fellow-men."

"Very well," said Sarah, "take him to the place of which you have spoken, but pray take good care of him on the way, for I have no other child but him. Oh, neglect him not, my husband. If he be hungry, give him bread, and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink; do not let him go on foot; speak kindly to him, shield him from the hot rays of the sun, and be kind to him and do not get angry at him." Sarah then chose a very fine gar-

ment and a beautiful turban for her son Isaac. On the top of the turban she fastened a precious stone. She also prepared provisions for the road. She wept bitterly and said: "Who knows if I shall ever see my son Isaac again?"

"I shall follow your wishes faithfully," Abraham reassured Sarah.

Early in the morning Sarah fell asleep and Abraham, seizing this chance, took with him two of his men, Ishmael and Eliezer, chopped wood for the burnt offering, and they all set out for the place of which God had spoken to him.

2. *Satan Interferes*

When Abraham and Isaac had traveled some distance, Sarah awoke from her sleep. Satan then appeared to her and said: "Where is thy husband?"

"My husband went on some journey," answered Sarah.

"And where is thy beloved son Isaac?" asked Satan.

"My son Isaac went with Abraham to a certain place to learn the law of God," replied Sarah.

"Why didst thou let him go there?" asked Satan. "Thou shalt never see him again."

"No harm can befall anyone unless God wills it," said Sarah.

Enraged by Sarah's answer, Satan went and appeared to Abraham in the figure of a very old

man, and said to him: "Where art thou going? Art thou mad? God gave thee a son in thine old age, and now thou art going to kill him. Hast thou lost thy senses?"

"I must do what God bids me, and I will do it gladly," answered Abraham.

Disappointed by this answer, Satan returned and appeared to Isaac in the figure of a young man.

"Tell me, lovely boy, whither art thou going?" asked Satan.

"I am going to learn the law of God," answered Isaac.

"Ha, ha, ha," laughed Satan, "when art thou going to learn the law of God, during thy lifetime or after thy death? Dost thou not know that thy foolish old father is leading thee to the slaughter?"

"Father," exclaimed Isaac, "what does this bad man want of me?"

"Do not listen to him," said Abraham.

Disappointed once more, Satan ran ahead of Abraham and transformed himself into a large river in the road. When Abraham and his son Isaac came to the river, and found neither bridge nor ford, they entered the river. But the farther they went, the deeper grew the river, until the water reached up to their necks. Abraham recognized the place and knew that there had been no water there before. He lifted his hands toward

heaven and said: "O Lord, it was Thy wish that Thy name be sanctified through me, and now if either my son or I be drowned in this river, how will Thy name be sanctified?"

"By My name do I swear," answered a holy voice from heaven, "that thou and thy son Isaac shall sanctify My name." God then rebuked Satan, and the river suddenly disappeared and the place became dry land again.

3. *The Sacrifice*

On the third day of his journey, Abraham raised his eyes and saw at a distance the place of which God had spoken to him. He noticed a large valley in front of him, surrounded by many hills. Suddenly the hills moved from their places, gathered in one place, and formed one big mountain. He also noticed a pillar of fire on the top of the mountain which reached to heaven, and the entire mountain was wrapped in a cloud, the like of which was never seen before.

"What can you see there, my son?" asked Abraham of Isaac.

"I see a pillar of fire and a cloud on the top of the mountain," answered Isaac.

"Do you see anything there?" asked Abraham of Ishmael and Eliezer.

"Where?" said they in surprise. "We see nothing there but hills and valleys."

"Then," said Abraham to his servants, "tarry

here with the donkey, while my son and I go to that place yonder, worship God, and then return to you."

While they walked along, Isaac said to his father: "I see the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb to be sacrificed as a burnt offering?"

"God has chosen you for a burnt offering, my son," answered the aged father.

"If God has chosen me," said Isaac, "I am ready to give up my life for Him; but I am very much grieved because of my mother."

Abraham and Isaac reached the place which they had seen from a distance, and Abraham began to build an altar on the top of the mountain, while Isaac handed him stones and mortar. Abraham took some wood and arranged it upon the altar. He then bound his son Isaac and placed him upon the wood.

"Pray, father," implored Isaac, "don't inform my mother about my death while she is standing on the roof, lest she throw herself down in her despair. Do not inform my mother about my death while she is passing a well, lest she throw herself into it. Burn me into fine ashes, gather them in a casket and place it in my mother's chamber. At all hours, whenever she enters the chamber, she will remember her son Isaac and weep for him.

"And, my father," continued Isaac, "what will

you and my mother do in your old age? Who will comfort you in time of grief?"

"We can survive you by a few days only," answered Abraham; "and He who was our Comfort before you were born, will comfort us still."

Abraham then rolled up his garments, leaned his knees upon Isaac with all his strength, took a knife and stretched out his hand to slaughter his son. And God sitting upon His throne, saw how the father was ready to slaughter his only son and how the son was willing to be slaughtered. Tears were rolling down from the eyes of Abraham upon Isaac, and from Isaac down upon the wood. At that moment the heavens were opened and the angels broke out in loud weeping. Their tears fell upon Abraham's knife, and three drops fell into Isaac's eyes.

"Stay thy hand," called a voice from heaven unto Abraham.

"Who art thou?" exclaimed Abraham.

"I am the angel Michael sent down by the Lord of Hosts," answered the voice.

"I shall not depart from this place, unless God himself will tell me to stay my hand, for it was He who ordered me to do this."

"Do not touch the boy," called a voice from heaven, "for now I know that thou fearest Me."

When Abraham turned around he saw a ram, with its horns entangled in a thicket. This ram

"Stay thy hand," called a voice from heaven

had been created in the twilight of the first Sabbath Eve, when God rested from His labors. It had fed in the Garden of Eden under the Tree of Life, and it had drunk at the fountain of the Garden, which waters the whole earth.

Abraham took his son Isaac off the altar and untied his hands. Thereupon God opened the heavens and Abraham heard these words: "By Myself I swear, because thou didst not withhold thy son from Me, I will bless thee and multiply thy children like the stars in heaven."

"Thou swearest," said Abraham, "and I also swear, I will not leave this altar until I have said what I have to say."

"Speak on, for I am listening," said God.

"When Thou didst command me to sacrifice my son Isaac," said Abraham, "I might have said, 'O Lord, yesterday Thou saidst that in Isaac my seed would be called,' and now Thou sayest, "Take thy son, thy only son, even Isaac, and offer him for a burnt offering'! But I said nothing. I was ready and willing to offer my son as a burnt-offering, although he is dearer to me than my own life. I pray to Thee, O Merciful God, that when my children in generations to come will arouse Thine anger by sinning against Thee, Thou mayest forgive them, and deliver them from their suffering."

"I know," said God, "that thy children in generations to come will sin against Me, and I will sit

in judgment upon them on New Year's day. If they desire that I grant them pardon, they shall blow the ram's horn on that day, and I, mindful of the ram that was substituted for Isaac as a sacrifice, will forgive them for their sins."

Abraham then took the ram, put it on the altar, and offered it as a burnt-offering instead of his son Isaac. The fire did not consume the entire ram, for the following parts were left: ten blood-vessels, the skin, and the two horns. The blood-vessels were used by King David as strings for the wonderful harp which he played. The skin was worn by Elijah the prophet as a girdle. The left horn was kept against the day when God should sound it on the mountain of Sinai when about to give the Children of Israel the Ten Commandments. The right horn remains hidden to this day. When God shall restore the people of Israel to their own country, Elijah the prophet will take this horn, and with it sound a very powerful blast which will be heard from one end of the world to the other. The Children of Israel, hearing this call, will return from all corners of the earth to the land of their birth.

Now the place on which Abraham erected the altar was the same spot upon which Adam had brought his first sacrifice, and Cain and Abel offered their gifts to God. On this spot Noah had built an altar to God after he had left the ark, and here, too, the Temple was destined to be built.

YOM KIPPUR (DAY OF ATONEMENT)

"On the tenth day of the seventh month there shall be a day of atonement. . . . You shall afflict your souls . . . and you shall do no work in that same day; for it is a day of Atonement." (Lev. xxiii, 27-28).

The days of repentance begin with Rosh Hashanah (New Year) and end with Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement). Yom Kippur is the most solemn day of the year. The Books of Life and Death that are opened on Rosh Hashanah are sealed on this day of judgment.

God ordained that all Jews fast on that day and abstain from all manner of pleasure. He further commanded us to repent for our sins and evil ways with all our hearts, and pray for His forgiveness. If we do repent of what we have done in the past and solemnly promise to improve in the future, the Almighty grants us pardon.

The Day of Atonement atones for all crimes committed against Heaven, but not for crimes committed against our fellowmen. It is therefore necessary to right all wrongs committed against our fellowmen and ask for their forgiveness. On the day preceding this day of judgment, it is customary to ask and obtain the pardon of any man whom we might have possibly wronged or insulted in our dealing with him during the year that has passed.

When the Temple was in existence, the high-priest used to enter the Holy of Holies in the Temple, where he offered incense to God and prayed for the welfare of the people.

RAB

Abba Arikha, or, as he is commonly known, Rab, was at the head of the Babylon college. He was one of the foremost disciples of R. Judah ha-Nasi, the compiler of the Mishnah.

Rab once had a misunderstanding with a certain butcher in his community. Now on the eve of the Day of Atonement, it is the duty of every Jew to ask the pardon of any one he might have wronged during the year. This butcher failed to appear to ask for Rab's pardon, and the rabbi said that he would go and ask for the butcher's pardon. On the way, Rab was met by Rab Huna, who asked: "Where are you going?"

"I am going to ask the pardon of a certain man," replied Rab.

R. Huna thereupon remarked to those who had accompanied him: "Abba is on his way to kill a man."

And so it was. Rab stood at the entrance of the butcher-shop, where the butcher was occupied with cutting open the skull of an animal. The butcher at last noticed Rab standing at the entrance, and he said: "You are Abba, are not you! Begone, for I will have nothing to do with you."

While he was saying this, the butcher forcibly hit the skull of the animal with his long knife. Whereupon a bone unloosened itself from the skull, hit the butcher in the head and caused his immediate death.

The Death of Simon the Just

Simon the Just ministered as high priest for forty years. Many miracles happened during his days. Once the king of Greece ordered that images be set up in the Temple, and the people fasted and prayed to God that the decree of the king come to nought.

While in the Temple, Simon the Just heard a voice announcing: "The king of Greece will be murdered and his decree nullified." Simon told the people of what he had heard in the Temple, and so indeed it turned out.

A representative of the king of Greece came to Jerusalem to see to it that his decree was carried out. The Jews pleaded with him not to execute the order of the king. Simon the Just then said to the people, "Why plead with a mortal who is unable to do you harm? Pray to the Almighty God, who is able to give you relief." At that moment a courier came from Greece, bringing with him a message which read: "The king of Greece has been assassinated, and his decree is null and void."

Once when Simon the Just came out from the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement, he looked very sad. The people who had always been accustomed to see his face expressing joy and mirth, asked in great bewilderment: "What, O lord, is the cause of your grief this day?"

"This year," said Simon the Just, "I am going to die."

"Where did you receive such tidings?" asked the people.

"During the forty years that I have been officiating at the Temple," said Simon, "I have been accustomed to see on every Day of Atonement, an old man dressed in white, who had the appearance of an angel, and who used to follow me when I went into the Holy of Holies, and to leave with me when I was through with my service there. This time, the same man appeared but he was dressed in black robes; he accompanied me into the Holy of Holies, but did not leave when I left."

And so it was. In that year, after the Festival of Tabernacles, Simon the Just gave up his ghost. The Israelites throughout the land mourned their great loss for many days.

SUKKOT (TABERNACLES)

"Also in the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep a feast unto the Lord seven days; on the first day shall be a Sabbath, and on the eighth day shall be a Sabbath.

"And you shall take on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the bough of thick trees, and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days.

"You shall dwell in booths seven days." (Lev. xxiii, 39-42).

This holiday takes place on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, Tishri. It is primarily an agricultural festival, celebrating the harvest season, and is therefore called "Hag Ha-Asiph."

For this reason we are told to take the four kinds of goodly trees upon which we pronounce benedictions, thanking God for the good harvest. The four kinds are: The Ethrog (citron), the Lulab (branches of palm trees), Hadasim (branches of myrtle trees), and the Araboth (branches of the willows of the brook).

It is obligatory to dwell in especially constructed booths during the seven days of this Festival.

The eighth day of this Festival is called Sh'mini 'Azeret, and the ninth day Simhat Torah—Rejoicing of the Law. On this day we conclude the reading of the Torah, and we also begin to read it all over again. Simhat Torah is a day of rejoic-

ing and merrymaking. Everybody, even children, are called up on that day to pronounce the benedictions over the Torah. We also march around with the scrolls in the synagogue, to give people an opportunity to kiss the Torah. For the Torah is the only treasure that was left us from all our past glories.

HANUKAH

HANUKAH

On the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month, Kislev, we begin celebrating Hanukah which lasts eight successive days. During this holiday we may perform all manner of work. It is nevertheless a festival of merriment and joy. We celebrate it mainly by lighting candles for eight days, beginning with one candle on the first night, and then increasing the number by one, each additional night, until the number eight is reached.

Over two thousand years ago, the Greeks oppressed the Jews very much. They forbade them to go to their synagogues to pray, to study their Torah and to worship their God. Antiochus, the Persian ruler at that time, wanted the Jews to put his image in our holy temple in Jerusalem. He even desired that the Jews worship the Grecian gods, and adopt Grecian customs.

The Maccabean family rose in revolt against the Greeks, and gained independence. They drove out all the Greeks from Jerusalem, destroyed the idols they put up in the temple, and again worshiped the true God in heaven. All this is told in the following story.

THE OPPRESSIONS OF THE JEWS BY THE GREEKS

1. *Heliodorus*

IN the days when the Greeks began to oppress the Jews, there was a traitor who informed King Seleucus II, that in the Temple at Jerusalem there were stored many treasures. The king, who was then in great need of money, called for his trustworthy general Heliodorus, and ordered him to go to Jerusalem and confiscate for the crown all the wealth stored in the Temple.

Arriving in Jerusalem with some of his picked troops, Heliodorus went to the high priest Onias, and said: "Our mighty king, Seleucus II, has been informed that in your temple are stored many valuable treasures, and he has ordered me to confiscate all I find there for the crown."

"The king has been misinformed," said the troubled Onias. "All that the Temple contains at present is charity money to help the orphans and the widows. Pray do not desecrate our holy Temple."

"I cannot disobey the command of my king," answered the determined Heliodorus. "The will of the king must be done."

In spite of the supplications of the high priest, Heliodorus forced his way into the Temple. But in the Temple the invader beheld an old man riding a powerful steed, and two beautiful little boys who held whips in their hands. The horse kicked Heliodorus and knocked him to the ground. Then the old man on the steed said to the two lads: "Strike the enemy without pity." The youths beat Heliodorus into unconsciousness with their whips, and the priests had to drag him out of the Temple.

A deep sleep then overcame Heliodorus, and he dreamt that the two beautiful youths by whom he had been beaten said to him: "Onias the Just has prayed to God for thy sake, and God has hearkened to his prayer. Now rise and pay him your respects."

Heliodorus awoke from his sleep with a start, but he was very happy to discover that he was still alive. He took leave of the high priest, after presenting him with many gifts of gold and precious stones.

King Seleucus II was furious when Heliodorus returned from the Jerusalem empty-handed. "Tell me, then, whom shall I now send to confiscate the treasures for me?" asked the disappointed king.

"O sire," said Heliodorus, "if you have an enemy in your land of whom you would like to

get rid, entrust him with the mission, for he will surely receive his just deserts."

2. *Elazar the Martyr*

When Antiochus ascended the throne, he sent expeditions into Jerusalem that robbed the Temple and carried off many of the inhabitants into captivity. This king issued an order: "We have but one language and one law. Any one who is caught fulfilling any of the laws of Moses will be put to death by horrible torture."

Among the many captives taken from Jerusalem, there was a venerable old man, Elazar by name. King Antiochus was anxious that all the captives worship the idols that he had erected, and he therefore sent one of his officers to speak kindly to Elazar and to persuade him to be the first one to bow to the idols. "For," thought the king, "if this old man, who has so much influence over his people will worship the idol, all the captives will follow his example."

The king's officers approached Elazar and said to him: "It is the will of the king that you worship the idols. If you will do the king's bidding the king will make you very rich and powerful."

"Silver and gold are naught," answered the venerable Elazar; "I will remain faithful to my God to the day of my death."

Knowing that the old man would have to suffer torture and death for his refusal to obey the wish

of the king, the officer took pity on him, and he said: "I have compassion on you, for I know that you will die a horrible death, therefore I will do this for you: I will give you meat to eat which is not forbidden by your Law. You will eat this meat before the idol, and the people, thinking that you are eating of the forbidden meat which was sacrificed to the idol, will follow your example."

"What! you wish me to deceive my brethren, and cause them to worship the despicable idols?" said Elazar indignantly. "It shall not be. I will not deceive my people, even if I have to die a thousand horrible deaths."

The officers pitied the old man, for their hearts were moved by his heroic answers. But the tyrannical king had no pity, and he ordered that Elazar be tortured in the public place until he died, so that all the other captives might be terrified into submission.

The sight of Elazar's tortures and death had just the opposite effect than the one the king expected. All the captives, as one man, now decided not to yield to the tyrant Antiochus, but to give up their lives for the sake of their faith.

3. *Hannah and Her Seven Sons*

Among the captives was a courageous woman named Hannah with her seven sons. They were brought before King Antiochus, who said to the eldest: "Bow to my image that you may live."

The eldest son said coolly: "The Lord our God commands us in His Torah, 'Thou shalt not have other gods; thou shalt not bow to them, neither shalt thou serve them.' How can I disobey His will?"

"But if you dare disobey me," said the king, "you shall suffer death."

"I am ready to die for the sake of my God," answered the youth.

The king became furious and turning to his officers, he said: "Bring here hot coals and pans; cut off his hands and cut out his tongue, and roast them on the fire pan in the presence of his mother and his brothers. Let them see the horrible death of this youngster, and learn to obey my command."

After the eldest son was put to death by these terrible tortures, the king turned to the second son, and he said to him: "Bow to the idols, so that you may spare yourself a horrible death."

"Bring on your fire and sword," said the second son, "and act with me as you see fit."

"Cut off his ears, nose, the fingers of his hands and the toes of his feet," exclaimed the ferocious king; "put his body on the hot coals, and let him die."

"Oh, you tyrant!" exclaimed the second son. "You can destroy our bodies, but you cannot destroy our souls. Our souls shall be taken up to heaven by the One who created them, and there they shall enjoy everlasting life; but your spirit

shall descend to the infernal regions, and your memory shall be a curse and a disgrace for ever and ever."

The second son was put to death as the king had commanded, and the king turned to the third one, and said: "You have seen what I have done to your older brothers. Now obey me and I will spare your life."

"You may double the tortures and take my life," said the third son, "but I will not disobey my Father in heaven."

Antiochus, noticing the courageous behavior of the lad and fearing that he might be insulted before his own officers, ordered that the head of the youth be removed at once. Thus did the third son meet with his death.

"Just make one bow to the idols," said the king to the fourth son, "and you will escape death."

"I will worship God, the Lord of the heavens and of the earth," said the fourth son; "and to Him alone will I bow." Thereupon the fourth son was also put to death by the order of the king.

When the fifth son was brought before the merciless king, the youth said: "O heartless king! You think that by killing us you will acquire for yourself a great name, and that you will go down in history as a great hero. Your name and memory will be cursed in all generations to come, for they will say, 'Surely there has never arisen a more tyrannical king than Antiochus.'"

Incensed at the words of the youth, the king exclaimed: "Remove him quickly from my sight." And thus did the fifth son meet with death for his loyalty to the Law of God.

Thereupon the sixth son was brought before the king, and the youth said: "O king, listen to my words. We have sinned against our merciful Father in heaven, and He has delivered us into your hands. But you have tortured us more than was the desire of our good God. Know you therefore that you will suffer for your cruelty, and that you will endure terrible tortures for your heartlessness."

The king ordered that this youth, too, be removed quickly from his sight, and thus the sixth son perished.

At last the youngest son was brought before the king. The king took pity on the tender youth and, turning to the mother who had looked on without complaint when her six sons were put to death, he said: "Six of your sons have already given up their lives, wherefore shall this one, too, die? Persuade him to obey my command, and I will make him the happiest man in my kingdom. And your life, too, O woman, will be saved."

The most unfortunate mother embraced her son, kissed him and said: "My youthful son! Pay no heed to this tyrant who has killed your six brothers. Rely not upon his word, for he himself knows not what may happen to him the next day.

By listening to this king you will lose everlasting life. Die for the sake of our God, as your six brothers have died, and our God in heaven will give you everlasting life in the world to come."

The king, abashed at being unable to persuade even a small boy to do his wish, said to the seventh son: "Here, I will drop my ring near you, and you will stoop to raise it from the ground. The people will then believe that you have bowed to the idol, and you will save me from disgrace. By doing this you will commit no crime, and your life will be saved."

"O you heartless king," said the youthful boy, "you think God will allow your cruel acts to pass by unnoticed? Behold, a day will come when you shall be punished manifold for your cruelty. You will die the death of a wretch."

"Remove him from my sight," shouted the very much disappointed king. "Let him suffer worse tortures than any of his brothers had received. Show no mercy."

Hannah, the unhappy mother, stood by the mutilated dead bodies of her seven sons, who had died for the sake of the Law of God, and she prayed thus: "O Lord God! Take my soul, so that I fall not into the hands of these tyrants." Hardly had she finished her prayer when her soul flew up to heaven.

THE REVOLT OF THE MACCABEES

1. *The Death of Antiochus*

THE aged high priest, Mattathias, raised the flag of revolt against the Greeks, and in many skirmishes defeated the enemy. The high priest died two years after he had started the uprising, and his son Judas the Maccabee became the leader of the Jews.

Antiochus decided to crush the rebellion, and to destroy all the Jews. He gathered a very large army, and he himself went at the head of his warriors. On the way to Judea, the wicked king was stricken with leprosy. The king was racked with pain, but he would not give up his intention to destroy the whole land of Judea.

"O sire," said the king's officers and councillors, "return to your land, and when you have been cured from your sickness, you will muster an army again and march against the rebels."

The king was enraged at these words, and angrily retorted: "I have no cause to fear anything. I possess both the oceans and the land, and

who is able to prevent me from doing what I desire to do? Proceed by forced marches to Jerusalem, and exterminate the rebels."

The king had hardly finished his arrogant speech, when his chariot happened to pass by one of the elephants which were used in the war. The elephant suddenly became frightened and uttered a loud roar. The horses of the king's chariot were startled by the trumpeting of the elephant, and upset the chariot on top of the sore body of the king. The fall fractured some of the king's bones, and he could no longer remain seated in the chariot. His bodyguards had to carry the king on their shoulders. But the king's crushed leprous body gave forth a terrible stench, and the bodyguards, unable to endure the awful odor, deposited the body of the king on the ground and ran away.

The king, writhing in terrible pain and agony, said: "If the God of Israel will heal me from this illness, I will visit His city, Jerusalem, and fill it with silver and gold. I will open all my treasures and consecrate them to the Temple of God. I will go among all the nations of the world and exclaim, 'There is none like the God of Israel.'"

But his prayers remained unanswered. His bones and flesh rotted on him while he was still alive. Thus did the wicked Antiochus die a horrible death in a strange land.

2. *The Miracles*

The brave Judas Maccabee fought many battles against the Greeks, and every time defeated them. When the victorious general thought that he would not be bothered by the invading Greeks for some time, he went with his army to Jerusalem to clean the Temple. He destroyed all the altars built there by the officers of Antiochus, demolished all the idols, and built a new altar. The Jews then proceeded to offer sacrifices upon the newly-built altar, but the holy flame which had perpetually burned upon the altar had become extinguished, and strange fire from the outside could not be brought in, for God had forbidden this in His Torah.

Judas with his victorious warriors fervently prayed to God, and a great miracle occurred. Out of the stones with which the altar had been erected, came forth a fire, and the assembled people fell on their faces and praised the Almighty for His mercy.

The priests then went to kindle the candelabra which was to burn in the Temple continually. In the candelabra they were permitted to use only special oil prepared for the purpose. Bottles of this specially prepared oil were always sealed with the seal of the high priest. The priests searched high and low for the oil, but none could be found anywhere.

Finally there was found a bottle of oil sealed with the seal of the high priest, but the oil in it was sufficient to supply the candelabra for only one day and one night. But to the joy of the victorious worshipers, another miracle occurred now. The little oil poured into the holy candle-stick lasted fully eight days and nights. The assembly broke out in loud praise, and said: "Praise ye the Lord, for His mercy endureth forever."

3. *The Wars Against Lysias*

After the death of Antiochus, Eupator, then still an infant, ascended the throne. Lysias, the commander-in-chief of the Grecian armies, went forth to crush the rebellion of the Maccabees. Judas, the fearless general, when he beheld the vast army, simply raised his eyes toward heaven and prayed. As soon as he lowered his eyes, he beheld five youths, riding fiery horses. Three of them went forth and slew many of the enemy, while the other two removed their golden shields and put them on Judas to protect him from the swords of the Greeks.

Judas, the fighting lion, encouraged by this sight, urged his men on to victory over the Greeks. Lysias made peace with Judas, and returned to his country.

Among the warriors in the army of Lysias, there was one officer named Nicanor, who had said on approaching the gates of Jerusalem: "I raise my

hand in solemn oath that I will raze this city and its Temple to the ground." Due to the heroic acts of the fighting men of Judea, Nicanor was taken captive. As the fingers of his hands were cut off and hung upon the gates of Jerusalem, the Judeans exclaimed: "Let the hands raised in defiance of God and His Temple become the food of the birds of heaven!" These gates were then known as "The Gates of Nicanor."

The peace made by Lysias with Judas was not of long duration, for Lysias upon reaching his country was induced by the officers of the youthful king Eupator to raise a mighty army, including many trained fighting elephants, and to renew the war against Judas. This time the youthful king, too, was taken to the battle-field.

The lion-hearted Judas was informed of the intention of Lysias, but he was not discouraged. He urged on his men to fight to the bitter end for the freedom of their country, and they won one victory after another.

During one of the battles Elazar, the brother of Judas, noticed a man with a golden shield riding a beautifully bedecked elephant. Thinking that this was the youthful King Eupator, Elazar broke through the lines of the enemy single-handed, crept underneath the elephant and stabbed it to death. The dying elephant fell on the brave Elazar and crushed him to death.

Shortly afterwards a messenger came and

informed Lysias that Philip, a friend of the late Antiochus, had rebelled against Eupator. The king and his commander-in-chief made peace with Judas, and swore never to wage war against Judea again.

PURIM

This holiday takes place on the fourteenth day of the twelfth month, Adar. We may perform work on that day, but we go to the synagogue and read the story of Esther. Read the story of Purim and you will know the reason why we make all kinds of noises when the name of Haman is mentioned by the Reader.

On this day, we send gifts to our friends, no matter whether they are rich or poor. We also give aid to the poor people who are in need of help.

This holiday is called Purim (lots), because Haman drew lots to find out which day in the year would be best for him to kill all the Jews of Persia and Media.

The following story tells how Esther, a cousin of a certain Jew Mordecai, became queen of Persia, and how she saved the Jews from certain destruction.

ESTHER

1. *The Feast to the Grandees*

HEN Ahasuerus became king of the Persians and the Medes, he ordered that the throne of King Solomon be brought to him. The king's advisers then said to him: "O mighty king, do not have Solomon's throne brought here for you to sit on, for it bodes evil to any one who dares to make use of it. In time passed, Pharaoh, king of Egypt, made war against Josiah, king of Jerusalem, and captured the throne of Solomon and brought it to Egypt. When Pharaoh made an attempt to ascend the throne, the lion stationed at its side stepped forward and struck the king so violently that he remained lame until the day of his death. Nebuchadnezzar then waged war against the Egyptians and brought the throne to Babylon. He, too, received a mighty blow and was felled to the ground by the lion when he attempted to ascend it. Then the mighty king Darius, your father, defeated the Babylonians, and brought this throne to Elam, in Media. Your father placed the throne in his treas-

ure vaults and said: "No one shall dare touch this holy throne, for whoever touches it suffers severe punishment! Now if your father was careful not to ascend the sacred throne, why should you not heed his warning?"

"Your words are the words of wisdom," said Ahasuerus. He at once issued a decree that men most skilled in the arts and crafts be brought from Tyre and from Alexandria in Egypt. When the skilled artificers were brought before him, he said to them: "You can have all the silver, gold, and precious stones you desire, and make me a throne exactly the same as that of King Solomon."

For three years the artificers worked diligently and only succeeded in making a poor imitation of the throne of King Solomon. So important did Ahasuerus consider the completion of the building of the throne, that he decided to celebrate the event by making a great feast to his grandees.

The king accordingly forwarded a royal invitation to all the grandees of his provinces which numbered one hundred and twenty-seven. The grandees came to the king's palace, all clad in white mantles. For six months the king celebrated, and feasted the nobles of his provinces. The guests were seated on couches made of pure silver and gold, and to impress the guests all the more with his wealth, Ahasuerus invited them to inspect his great treasures of silver, gold and precious stones.

When Ahasuerus boasted of his wealth, one of the guests, a venerable old prince, said to his friends: "If it be your desire, I shall tell you where the king has obtained his treasures."

"We are anxious to know where he obtained them," exclaimed the inquisitive listeners, "pray, tell us."

"Oh, you nobles of Persia and Media," began the venerable prince, "know you that all the vast wealth that you see here is not the personal property of the king, but belongs to the crown. This wealth was acquired by the king in this wise: "The great and mighty Nebuchadnezzar subjugated many nations and with the spoil he had obtained from the vanquished kings, he filled his treasuries with silver, gold and precious stones. Nebuchadnezzar was a great miser and would not have his wealth pass to his heirs. When he felt that his end was drawing nigh, he resolved to sink his immense treasures in the Euphrates rather than have them descend to his heir, Evil-merodach. He accordingly built ships made of copper, filled them with the treasures and sank them somewhere in the Euphrates. Only Nebuchadnezzar knew the place where his treasures had been sunk, and the secret died with him. But when King Cyrus ascended the throne of Persia and gave permission to the Jews to rebuild the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, he was rewarded by God. One day, as Cyrus was sailing on the Euphrates, he discovered

the ships laden with the treasures. Cyrus conveyed the ships to Persia and filled his coffers with the treasure. These are the very treasures which have come into the possssion of our king Ahasuerus and of which he avails himself to make his feast resplendent."

2. *The Feast to the Residents of Shushan*

The feast to the grandees lasted one hundred and eighty days. At the end of that time, Ahasuerus decided to arrange a great celebration for the residents of the capital city Shushan. The feast was held in the royal gardens which had been richly decorated by the pompous Ahasuerus. From tree to tree stretched curtains of byssus, white and sapphire blue, and vivid green and royal purple. These curtains were fastened to supports by cords suspending from round silver beams. The silver beams rested on pillars of red, green, yellow, white, and glittering blue marble. The floors were tiled with crystal and marble set with precious stones. The couches were made of costly draperies, their feet were made of silver, and the rods attached to them were of gold.

The wine and all the other beverages were drunk from vessels made of pure gold, and the wine was in each case older than the one who drank it. The butlers were ordered to serve every guest with wine that had come from his native place.

Now it was the custom in Persia that every one

participating in a feast had to drink a large beaker of wine, far exceeding his drinking capacity. In many cases, a visitor was forced by the butler to drink the full contents of the beaker, resulting either in the loss of his reason or in the loss of his life. Participants would bribe the butlers so that they would not be forced to drink to excess, and the office of butler thus became a lucrative position. Ahasuerus ordered his butlers not to force any guest to drink to excess, but to let every one do as he saw fit.

"It is my aim," said the boastful Ahasuerus, "to please every guest and to allow each one to follow the inclination of his heart." When the king uttered these proud words, God became wroth with him, and said: "Thou fool, art thou able to fulfill every man's desire? If two men love the same woman, canst thou please each of them? If two vessels sail forth together from one port, and if one desires a south wind, and the other a north wind, canst thou produce a wind to satisfy both?"

Ahasuerus ordered the vessels of the Temple be brought in, and their magnificence was so great, that the golden splendor of the other vessels was dimmed. The Jewish guests refused to sit at the table where the vessels of the Temple were displayed.

Queen Vashti, too, made a feast to the women of Shushan and the wives of the nobles. The banquet tendered by her equaled in splendor that

given by her husband. It was held in the halls of the palace, instead of in the garden.

The queen was the daughter of King Belshazzar. When Belshazzar was killed in his own palace, Vashti, alarmed by the confusion that followed, and unaware of the death of her father, fled to the throne-room to seek him. Darius, the king of Media, had already ascended the throne of Balshazzar, and so it happened that Vashti, instead of finding refuge with her father, ran straight into the hands of her father's conqueror. But Darius took pity on her, and gave her to his son Ahasuerus for wife.

3. *The Fate of Queen Vashti*

On the seventh day of the banquet, the king and the nobles became merry with wine, and they began to converse about women. The Persians said: "The charms of the women of our people can be excelled by no other women in the world."

"The Medes replied: "In this world there is no woman superior to that of the Median woman."

"You are all wrong," said the king who was deep in his cups; "my wife is neither a Persian nor a Mede, but a Chaldean, yet she excels any woman in beauty. Would you convince yourself of the truth of my word?"

"Yes," shouted the assembly who were likewise deep in their cups, "let her be brought hither that we may be convinced that your words are true.

But let her appear before us without adornment, so that we may properly judge of her natural beauty and charms."

The king agreed, and he at once ordered his courtiers to summon the queen. He instructed them as follows: "Tell the queen to wear the golden crown on her head, to hold a golden cup in each hand, and to appear thus before the one hundred and twenty-seven princes who were invited as guests to the royal banquet. Let her omit the royal apparel, lest they say that her beauty is not natural but artificial."

Queen Vashti refused to obey the command of the king, and replied thus: "O you fool and madman! You and your princes must have lost your reason by too much drinking. I am Vashti, the daughter of Belshazzar, who was a son of the great and mighty Nebuchadnezzar, who scoffed at kings and to whom princes were a derision; even you would not have been deemed worthy to run before my father's chariot as a courier. Had he lived, I should never have been given to you for wife."

The king was infuriated when he received the queen's daring reply, and he said to the messengers: "Go and tell the queen that if she refuses to obey my order, her punishment shall be immediate death."

When the second summons of Ahasuerus was delivered to Vashti, with the threat of death in case of disobedience, she said to herself: "Well,

the king is drunk, and he really may carry out his threat if I disobey. There is no alternative. I must comply with his mad wish and get ready to go." She at once summoned her attendants to prepare her for her appearance before the king and the princes.

Now God had become displeased with Vashti because of a remark she once had made. At one time Ahasuerus yielded to the request of the Jewish nobles, and agreed to grant them permission to rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem. Thereupon Vashti interfered with these reproachful words: "Will you rebuild the Temple which my ancestors have destroyed?" Because of her remark Ahasuerus withdrew his consent.

God now sent down the angel Gabriel to disfigure Vashti's countenance. Suddenly signs of leprosy appeared on her face. She became greatly alarmed upon viewing herself in the mirror, and she told the king's messengers to deliver the following reply: "My lord, it is for your own good that I refuse to obey your order. If the people decide that I do not come up to your description of me, they will pronounce you a liar. If, on the other hand, they do declare me the fairest woman in your realm, then, bewitched by my beauty, they may kill you in order to gain possession of me."

The anger of the king was kindled when Vashti refused a second time to obey his command, and, turning to the Jewish sages, he said: "I request of

you that you pass sentence upon my queen for disobeying my order to appear before me and the one hundred and twenty-seven crowned princes of the realm."

The Jewish sages were unwilling to pass sentence upon the queen, for they thought to themselves: "If we condemn the queen to death, we shall suffer for it as soon as Ahasuerus becomes sober and learns that at our advice she was put to death. But if we plead for mercy now, when he is intoxicated, he will accuse us of being unfaithful to him." They therefore made the following reply: "O sire, from the time the Temple was destroyed and we have been in exile, we have lost the power to give sage advice, particularly in matters pertaining to life and death. Better seek counsel of the wise men of Ammon and Moab, who have ever dwelt at ease in their own lands."

Thereupon Ahasuerus turned to the seven princes of Persia and Media, and said: "Give me your counsel. What shall be done with my queen for refusing to obey my command?"

"O mighty king, it is not against the king alone that Vashti has sinned," said Memuchan, one of the princes, "but also against all the subjects of your great realm. Every woman in your domain will henceforth follow the example of the queen and disobey her husband, knowing that she will suffer no punishment. O sire, it is therefore my counsel that she be made an example of, and that

she suffer the penalty of death for her disobedience, so that, in the future, no woman shall dare to disobey her husband."

"Do you concur in the opinion of Memuchan?" asked the intoxicated king of the six other princes.

"Yes, O king, we agree with him," they answered. And without delay, Queen Vashti was executed by royal decree.

When the king became sober and learned that he had executed his queen at the advice of his seven princes, he flew into a rage against them, and ordered that they, too, be put to death.

4. *Esther Chosen Queen*

The king was greatly grieved over the loss of his queen. He was advised by his councillors to assemble the fairest maidens of the one hundred and twenty-seven provinces of the realm, and to select from among them one fit to succeed Vashti as his queen. Their advice pleased Ahasuerus and he immediately issued a royal decree that all the fair maidens of his empire be gathered together and brought to the king's palace.

Now in the capital city there lived a very pious man of noble birth whose name was Mordecai. Mordecai had a little cousin named Hadassah, which means Myrtle, and when Hadassah lost both her father and her mother, Mordecai and his good wife took the little orphan into their home and raised her with tender love and care. Hadas-

sah grew up to be a very fair and virtuous maiden, and people said that she was rightfully named Hadassah, because her good deeds spread her fame far and wide, just as the sweet fragrance of the myrtle pervades the air in which it grows. And because she was a maiden of great charm and beauty, she was likewise called Esther, that is, Venus. For like the morning star, she was at first a hidden light that suddenly shone upon Israel in time of darkness and despair.

When the royal decree was issued ordering the fairest maidens of every province to be gathered together for the king's inspection, Esther was kept concealed in the house of Mordecai, so that the searching eyes of the king's spies might not detect her. But the fame of her beauty and charms had already spread far and wide, and the spies of the king said to Mordecai: "If you fail to produce your cousin, you shall suffer the penalty of death."

Mordecai thereupon brought forth his cousin Esther, who was immediately brought to Hegai, the chief officer of the king's harem. There Esther refused to accept the perfumes, powders and jewels allotted by royal decree to every maiden who was to appear before the king. She even declined the services of the seven maids that were assigned to her. All the other maidens made many demands before they were brought before the king, but Esther made none whatsoever.

When Esther was brought into the presence of

the king, he placed her between two rows of beauties, Median beauties to the right of her, and Persian beauties to her left. But Esther's charms outshone them all. Ahasuerus was thrilled by Esther's remarkable grace and knew her beauty to be unsurpassable as soon as he set his eyes upon her. The king at once decided to set the royal crown upon her head and to make her queen instead of Vashti. He summoned Hegai to the palace and ordered him to take extreme care of Esther, and to give her whatever her heart desired. The king was so pleased with his choice that he at once removed the portrait of his late queen, and replaced it with that of Esther's.

The exalted station in which Esther suddenly found herself did not change her ways and manners. She remained as modest and as silent as she had been till then. Hegai, the chief keeper of the harem, was not at all pleased with Esther's modest ways, and one day, he said to her: "You do nothing to preserve your beauty, and you refuse to eat anything but vegetables, bread and water. Now when the king becomes aware of this, he will blame me for it, and I may be brought to the gallows."

"Have no fears about me, good Hegai," said Esther, "I know that I shall retain my good health upon the diet I have chosen." And indeed Esther was justified in her statement, for she grew more and more charming and beautiful as the days

passed by. Hegai, pleased with the results, loaded Esther down with the most costly jewels to be found at the king's palace.

Mordecai, mindful of the perils to which Esther was exposed, visited the court of the king's harem daily to make sure of his cousin's well-being. One day Mordecai said to Esther: "My child, I know that within a short time you will be crowned queen of the realm. Pray keep your descent and your faith a secret and do not disclose them to any living being."

"Why do you make this request?" asked Esther in great bewilderment.

"You well know that the king is erratic," said Mordecai; "that in his fury he caused the death of his beloved queen. I fear that should the king become angry with you, he will appease his wrath not only by taking your life but also by annihilating all the Jews in his provinces."

Esther saw the wisdom of Mordecai's words, and promised to keep her descent a secret. Ahasuerus made many efforts to learn the secret of her descent from Esther, after he had made her his queen. He arranged great banquets in her honor, but she guarded her secret carefully.

When Esther became queen, Ahasuerus issued a decree to all his peoples saying: "For the sake of my queen Esther, I, Ahasuerus, king of Persia and Media, do hereby release all my subjects from paying taxes and imposts this year."

The king then said to Esther: "You see that for your sake I have done something which has never been done before, and you still refuse to disclose your secret to me. Pray tell me to what nation you belong."

"I know neither my family nor my people," replied Esther, "for I lost my parents in early infancy. I am an orphan, and God, the Father of the fatherless, in His mercy, has brought me up."

5. *The Conspiracy*

One day, King Ahasuerus said to Esther: "Tell me, whose daughter you are."

"Tell me, pray, whose son you are," asked the queen.

"I am the son of the mighty king Darius," replied Ahasuerus.

"If you are a real prince," said Esther, "how could you have put Vashti to death?"

"It was not to gratify my own wish," said Ahasuerus; "I merely followed the advice of the great princes of Persia and Media."

"Your royal predecessors Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, the kings of Babylon, and even Darius, your father, took no counsel from ordinary human beings," said Esther. "They were guided by prophetic counsel. Daniel was there to advise them."

"Are there any left of these prophets?" asked Ahasuerus anxiously.

"O sire, make search and you will find them," replied Esther.

The result of this conversation was that Mordecai was given the position at court once occupied by Bigthan and Teresh, who were now reduced to the position of butlers to the king. The two ousted officials were indignant and angry at the king, and by way of revenge conspired to take his life.

One day, while Mordecai was sitting in the court of the king, he overheard a conversation between Bigthan and Teresh: "It is impossible to assassinate the king without being detected, for he is surrounded constantly by numerous courtiers and attendants. We can accomplish our purpose much easier by poisoning him. Let us drop poison into his cup of wine before handing it to the king. We are his butlers and we can carry out our plan at any time we see fit."

The two plotters saw Mordecai sitting within hearing distance of them. But they were not afraid to discuss their plan, because they presumed that he would not understand the language they spoke, for they were using their native tongue, the Tarsian. They did not know that Mordecai had been a member of the highest Jewish court, the Sanhedrin, and that, as such, he knew all the seventy languages of the world.

Mordecai at once sent word to Esther that she convey the following message to the king: "The

two butlers, Bigthan and Teresh, have hatched up a horrible plot against the king. They have resolved to take the life of the king by putting poison into his wine." Consequently, the king had the wine, which he was given to drink, tested and it was proven to contain poison. The conspirators were convicted of their crime, and suffered the penalty of death. Thereupon it was recorded in the chronicles of the king, how Mordecai had saved the life of the king by disclosing a mischievous conspiracy against him.

HAMAN'S PLOT

1. *The Barber of Karzum*

NE day, a certain man, Haman by name, settled in the Persian village of Karzum. There he lived for a period of twenty-two years with his wife who bore to him ten sons. Haman was a barber by trade, and with his earnings could scarcely support his wife and children.

Haman decided to leave Karzum and seek his fortune elsewhere. When in the course of his wanderings he arrived in a certain town, he was informed that the Persian general was looking for valiant men to recruit for his army, and that suitable persons would get good wages for their service. Haman lost no time and joined the Persian army.

A terrible war soon broke out in which the army of the Persians suffered a disastrous defeat, and the general and his men fled into the wilderness. There the Persian soldiers suffered from hunger and thirst and many of them perished. Haman tasted no food and drank no water for two days

and two nights. He went around begging the surviving soldiers to have pity on him and let him have a morsel of bread and at least one mouthful of water, but he was rebuffed everywhere.

Greatly discouraged and disappointed, Haman continued wandering aimlessly in the wilderness, when one day he met a Jewish soldier. Haman was extremely faint with hunger and thirst, but he no longer had any strength and courage left in him to beg for help. But the Jewish soldier, noticing Haman's plight, asked: "Tell me what ails you, perhaps I can be of assistance to you."

"I am famished," answered Haman faintly, and so saying, fell exhausted to the ground. This Jewish soldier was none other than Mordecai. Mordecai raised Haman from the ground, and, opening his bag, said: "I still have left a stale morsel of bread and a few drops of water; you may help yourself to half of it."

"You have certainly saved me from sure death," said Haman to Mordecai, "and I know not wherewith to thank you. Here," continued Haman, pulling out some parchment from one of his pockets, "I am going to sell myself to you as a slave, and I will record the sale on this parchment."

But there was no ink and no pen with which to write the document, so Haman obtained a thorn, scratched his flesh with it until blood dripped from the wound, and, using the point of the thorn as a pen and the blood from his veins as ink, he wrote

upon the parchment as follows: "I, Haman, son of Hammedatha of the family of Agag, being a soldier in our king's army, was left without food and drink in the wilderness. I was on the point of dying from hunger and thirst when Mordecai, a Jew, had compassion upon me, shared with me his last morsel of bread and a few drops of water, and thus saved my life. I therefore sell myself forever as a slave to Mordecai."

On the following day, the soldiers in the Persian army were ordered home, for the Indian city that had rebelled against Ahasuerus was defeated. Thereupon Haman returned to his wife and children. After some time, Haman decided again to leave the village with his family and to settle in a place where he might be able to earn a livelihood. In the course of his wanderings, he came upon a treasure, whereupon he bought a beautiful palace in Shushan, and went to live there. Here he gained the reputation of being the richest man in the realm, and thus he became a frequent visitor at the court of Ahasuerus.

2. *Mordecai's Pride*

Haman found favor in the eyes of King Ahasuerus, and he was raised by the king to the highest office in the realm. Ahasuerus also issued an order, that all who saw Haman were to prostrate themselves before him and pay him homage. Thereupon Haman had the miniature of an idol

fastened to his clothes, so that whoever bowed down before him, might worship the idol at the same time.

One day, Haman beheld Mordecai in the court of the king, and he at once recognized his benefactor. Haman then said to himself: "Here is the man to whom I have sold myself as a slave forever. Should he disclose the fact, the king will take away all honors from me, and I shall lose all my glory and my high station in life. Now I am going to pass Mordecai; if he bows to me, it will show that he no longer recognizes me, and I have nothing to fear; but should he refuse to bow down to me, it will prove that he has recognized me as his slave and that therefore he refuses to pay me homage."

When Mordecai beheld the image fastened to Haman's clothes, as Haman approached him, Mordecai said to himself: "If I bow to Haman, then my God will punish me; and if I refuse to bow, then the king will take my life. But I will rather disobey the mortal king than violate the law of the Eternal." So when Haman passed by, Mordecai did not stir from his place.

"Now," thought Haman hopelessly, "he has surely recognized me and has refused to bow to me. There is no way out of it; I must devise ways and means to take my master's life, and thus save myself from everlasting disgrace."

The servants and officials of the king who sat at

the gate of the royal palace said to Mordecai: "Tell us wherein you are better and greater than we are, that we should pay reverence to Haman and prostrate ourselves before him, while you disobey the order of the king and do not bow to him."

"Listen, O you men without understanding," said Mordecai; "hear you my words and then make a proper reply to them. How can I bow to a man born of woman and of but a few days' duration? At his birth, there is weeping, in his youth, pain and groans, all his days are full of trouble, and in the end he returns to dust. Shall I prostrate myself before such a being? I bend the knee before God alone, the only living One in heaven."

"And who is the God before whom you bow?" asked the servants and officials of the king.

"The God whom I fear and before whom I bend the knee is the ever-living One; He holds the earth in His arms; He stretches out the heavens in His might; he darkens the sun when it pleases Him; and illumines the dark; He has set a bound to the waters of the seas, they rage and yet they cannot pass their limit and overflow the land. With His word He created the heavens and the earth. The sun, the moon and the Pleiades run before Him; the stars and the planets are not idle for a single moment; they rest not, they speed before Him as His messengers, going in every direction, to do the will of Him who created them.

To Him alone praise is due, before Him alone must we prostrate ourselves."

"Yet we know well that one of your ancestors bowed down to a human being," said the court officials.

"Who was it?" asked Mordecai.

"Your ancestor Jacob prostrated himself before Haman's ancestor Esau," replied the court officials.

"But I am a descendant of Benjamin," asserted Mordecai, "who was not yet born when his father Jacob bowed down to the ground before Esau."

3. *The Casting of Lots*

Haman's hatred toward Mordecai steadily grew, and he resolved to destroy not only Mordecai but also the whole Jewish people.

When Haman disclosed his design to one of his friends named Zaharan, the latter said: "You with your plot remind me of the story of a little bird who grew angry at the sea and undertook to make it dry."

"Pray tell me about this little bird," said Haman.

"A heron once built its nest along the shore of the sea," began Zaharan, "and there it raised its little ones. One day, when the heron returned from her daily flight to bring some food for her little ones, she found no trace of her nest or of her little ones, for the billows of the sea had risen

very high that day and had swept away her nest together with her young. The heron grew angry at the sea, and in her great wrath she exclaimed: 'O you mischievous sea! I am going to take my revenge on you, and I will dry up your proud billows.' And she immediately started out upon her great task. She took a mouthful of water and spilled it on the sand, and she then took a mouthful of sand and spilled it in the water. Thus she continued repeating the process steadily without allowing time to either eat or drink. 'I have a great task before me,' said the bird, 'I must not permit myself to rest or sleep until my task is done.'

"Another bird noticed the heron at her labor and inquired: 'Pray tell me what you are trying to do?'

" 'This proud haughty sea has destroyed my children,' replied the heron sadly; 'so I will not rest until I dry up its waters.'

"The bird laughed heartily and said to the heron: 'Even if the creatures of the whole world should come to your aid, you would be unable to accomplish your task.' "

"You are talking nonsense," said the somewhat discouraged Haman to his friend. "I am not the silly bird and the Jews cannot be compared to the waters of the seas."

Before proceeding to take steps to carry out his plans for the annihilation of the Jews, Haman

desired to determine the most favorable moment for his undertaking. He decided first of all to cast lots in order to ascertain the day of the week on which his plot stood the best chance of success. Haman, thereupon, requested Shimshai, the scribe, to cast lots for him.

When Shimshai was about to cast lots, the Seven Days of the Week flew up to heaven and presented themselves before God. Sunday was the first one to speak: "O merciful God! On me the heaven and earth came into existence. Upon Israel depends my existence, for were it not for Thy covenant with Israel, there would be neither day nor night, neither heaven nor earth. O Lord, destroy me before Thou destroyest Israel."

Sunday stepped aside and Monday appeared before the Almighty, saying: "On me Thou didst create the firmament, separating the heavenly waters from those remaining on the earth; this is symbolic of the difference between Israel who worships Thee who art in heaven, and the heathens who worship idols that are on earth. O Lord, destroy me before Thou destroyest Israel."

Tuesday, too, protested: "On me Thou didst create the vegetable world. Israel serves Thee, O Lord, by uttering benedictions over each vegetable and fruit, and by giving tithes thereof to the poor and the needy. O Lord, destroy me before Thou destroyest Israel."

Then Wednesday spoke, saying: "O merciful

God, on me the heavenly luminaries were created. Thou didst swear to the ancestors of Israel saying, 'Thy children shall be as the stars of heaven.' O Lord, destroy me before Thou destroyest Israel."

Thursday, too, protested against the annihilation of Israel, saying: "On me were created all winged fowl, from among which Israel brings sacrifices to Thy great Name. When Israel will be no more, who will bring offerings? O Lord, destroy me before Thou destroyest Israel."

Friday presented itself before God and said: "On me man was created, and Thou, O Lord, hast said to Israel, 'Ye are men.' Now if Israel is destroyed, why should I remain in existence? O Lord, destroy me before Thou destroyest Israel."

Finally Sabbath appeared before the Almighty, and said: "It was Thy will, O Lord, that I should be a sign between Israel and Thee. If Thou wilt destroy Israel, then Thou wilt have no need of me. O Lord, destroy me before Thou destroyest Israel."

Thus Haman could find no day of the week opportune for the destruction of the Jews. He then began to cast lots to search for the month that might prove suitable for his sinister undertaking. Thereupon the Twelve Months of the Year presented themselves before God to plead Israel's cause.

Nisan: "In me Israel was redeemed from the

land of bondage, and therefore I am considered as the first month of the year. O Lord, let not Israel be destroyed in me."

Iyar: "O Lord, in me Thou didst cause the first manna to fall for Israel in the desert. In me, also, Amalek suffered his defeat at the hands of Israel. Pray cause no calamity to befall Israel in me."

Sivan: "In me, Thou, O Lord of the world, didst give the Torah to the children of Israel. O Lord, do not bring about the destruction of Israel in me."

Tammuz and Ab: "O Lord of the world, in us misfortune befell Thy people Israel. The enemy entered the Holy City and destroyed Thy Temple and exiled Thy children to strange lands. Let the terrible memories that we bring to them suffice, and let no other misfortune befall them in us."

Elul: "In me, Gideon overcame the Midianites and the Amalekites. In me, the work of building the wall around the city of Jerusalem was completed. Pray, O Lord, let no calamity befall them in me."

Tishri: "In me, the Jewish kingdom was firmly established by the dedication of the Temple built by Solomon. On my tenth day Thou, O Lord, dost forgive Israel his sins, and on my fifteenth day Israel celebrates the Feast of Tabernacles, and praises Thy holy and great Name. O merciful Father, let no misfortune befall the children of Israel in me."

Heshvan: "In me their pious mother Sarah died. O Lord, have compassion on her children as she had compassion on the poor and the needy. In me, too, the building of the Temple at Jerusalem was completed. Pray let not this event be obscured by the annihilation of Israel."

Kislev: "In me, Sihon, king of Bashan, was conquered by the Jews. O Lord, let no misfortune befall them in me."

Tebet: "In me the giant, Og, king of Bashan, was conquered by Israel. O Lord, destroy not Thy children in me."

Shebat: "In me, there occurred the civil war of the eleven tribes against the tribe of Benjamin because of the godless conduct of the Benjaminites. Let the blood shed by the eleven tribes be a sign of their loyalty to Thee, O Lord, and let no harm befall them in me."

And when the twelfth month Adar flew up to heaven and presented itself before the throne of Divine Majesty, God asked: "What happening has occurred in thee, that thou comest up to plead for Israel?"

Adar made no reply, for it was actually a month in which no memorable historic event had occurred to the Jewish people. Therefore, when Haman had finished casting his lots, the month of Adar was found to be the one favorable for his sinister plot against the Jews.

"Now," said Haman to Shimshai, "let us study

the twelve signs of the Zodiac with regard to the Jews. What is the constellation for the month of Nisan?"

"The first constellation is a ram," replied Shimshai.

"Their God will do them no harm during this month," said Haman, "for they are likened to 'scattered sheep.'"

"The constellation for the month of Iyar is a bull," declared Shimshai.

"This will not do," asserted Haman, "because one of their ancestors, Joseph, was called 'the firstling bullock.'"

"The next constellation, that for the month of Sivan, is the twins," declared Shimshai.

"This will not do either," said Haman, "for Tamar bore twins unto Judah, one of their ancestors, and they proved to be righteous men."

"The month of Tammuz is represented by the Crab," declared Shimshai.

"Neither will this do," decided Haman, "for the Crab is called Saratan, the scratcher, and Israel shall scratch sorely all those that oppress him."

"The next constellation, that for the month of Ab, is the Lion," stated Shimshai.

"Daniel who was cast into the den of lions will protect Israel from his enemies," declared Haman.

"The constellation for the month of Elul is the Virgin."

"Israel is compared to a virgin," argued

Haman, "for they refuse to recognize any gods other than their own God."

"Tishri is represented by the Balance."

"Nor will this do," declared Haman, "for Job, the most righteous and God-fearing man, said, 'He weighs me in the balance of righteousness.' It is very likely then that the pious Job will plead for Israel."

"The constellation for the month of Heshvan is the Scorpion," said Shimshai.

"Israel, too, is called the scorpion," said Haman, "and therefore this month will not be propitious."

"Next comes the Archer, representing the month of Kislev."

"The sons of Judah are masters of the bow," argued Haman, "and the bows of the mighty men directed against them will be broken. So this month will not do."

"The month of Tebet is represented by the Goat."

"It was by means of the goat that Isaac's blessing was won by Jacob, the ancestor of the Jews," said Haman, "and therefore no misfortune can be caused to his descendants during this month."

"The next constellation is the Water-bearer, representing the month of Shebat."

"Neither will I be able to do harm to the Jews during this month," said Haman, "for their leader, Moses, acted as water-bearer when he drew water

for the daughters of Jethro to save them from the hands of the shepherds."

"The remaining constellation is that of the Fishes for the month of Adar," announced Shimshai.

"This constellation is certainly most favorable for my plot," exclaimed Haman with elation. "On this month, their leader, Moses, died, and therefore it signifies that I will be able to swallow them as one swallows the fishes."

Whereat the angels in heaven exclaimed: "O thou villain! In the month of Adar, Moses, the great leader of Israel, was born. He shall plead Israel's cause, and thou wilt discover to thy cost that though fishes are sometimes swallowed, they sometimes swallow in turn. This time the fishes will swallow, and not be swallowed."

4. *Haman Denounces the Jews*

To carry out his mischievous designs against the Jews, Haman appeared before Ahasuerus and said: "O mighty king! Permit me, pray, to relate to you some of my experiences. To my mind, they will prove to be of great benefit to the crown."

"You have my permission," said the king.

"O sire," began Haman, "due to your great kindness and graciousness I have been raised to the highest office in the realm. To repay, at least in a small degree, the favors bestowed upon me, I have spared neither time nor money in investi-

gating the various peoples that are subject to the crown in order to determine which of them are loyal and which are unfaithful to the king.

"Most of them, yea all of them, I have found to be loyal. They have patriotic customs and they obey the laws of the king. But there is a certain people, the Jews, dispersed among the peoples in the provinces of the kingdom, who are proud and presumptuous. Their religion differs from the religion of every other people, and their laws are different from the laws of every other land. They pay no heed to our laws and customs, and they do not execute the decrees of the king.

"They spend their time in this wise: The first hour of the day they make preparations for reciting, 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.' The second hour they pass in prayers; the third in eating; the fourth in giving thanks to their God for the food and drink He has granted them, and the fifth hour they devote to their business. In the sixth hour they are ready to return home to rest, and in the seventh, their wives call for them, saying, 'Be seated, you weary ones, you are so exhausted by the cruel king's service.'

"The seventh day of the week they celebrate as their Sabbath. On that day, they do no manner of work whatsoever. They go to their synagogues, pray to their God, read out of their Scroll of the Law, and translate portions of their Prophets.

"In the month of Nisan, they celebrate for eight

days the feast of Passover. They put all the leaven in their homes out of sight, and say, 'This is the day, on which our fathers were redeemed from the land of Egypt.' During these eight days they go to their synagogues, read out of their books, and translate from the writings of their Prophets.

"In the month of Sivan, they celebrate for two days the Feast of Weeks, because they say that on these days their God revealed Himself to their ancestors on Mount Sinai and gave them the Ten Commandments. During this festival, they go to their synagogues, pray to their God, read out of their sacred books, and translate passages from the books of their Prophets. Then they ascend to the roofs of their synagogues from which they throw down apples and roses to the crowd gathered beneath. When these are picked up they say, 'As these apples and roses are gathered, so may we be gathered from our dispersion among the heathen nations.'

"On the first day of the month of Tishri, they celebrate the New Year. They again go to their synagogues, read out of their Torah, and translate passages from the writings of their Prophets. They blow the trumpets, saying: 'On this Day of Memorial may we be remembered by our merciful God for good, and may our enemies be remembered for evil.'

"On the ninth day of the same month they

slaughter cattle, geese, and poultry. They and their wives and their children eat and drink. But as soon as the day is passed and evening draws nigh, they proclaim the arrival of the Great Holy Fast. They fast the whole of that night and all of the next day. They abstain from eating and drinking, and they even force their wives and their little ones to touch no food or drink the entire day. They say: 'On this day our sins are forgiven, and are added to the sum of the sins of our enemies.' They go to their synagogues, read the whole day out of their books, from their Scroll of Law, and translate passages from the writings of their Prophets.

"On the fifteenth day of this month they celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. They go to our parks, where they cut down palm branches, pluck the fruit of the citron, and cause havoc among the willows of the brook by cutting off branches. They cover the roofs of their houses with foliage, and then they go to the synagogues to pray, and to read out of their books. Then they form a procession and march around with their willow branches, palm branches and the citrons, all the while jumping and skipping like goats.

"In this manner, they waste the entire year with their nonsensical religion, and when they are required to do the king's service, they reply: 'To-day is Sabbath, to-day is a festival.' When we desire to purchase anything from them, they

close their stores and say: 'To-day is a holy day and we are not permitted to desecrate it by doing business.' Now it were best for the king and the government to destroy them all, that they may not think that they are a privileged people and superior to all the peoples in the realm."

When Haman concluded his denunciation of the Jews, the angel Michael appeared before the Lord, saying: "O Lord of the world! Thou knowest well that the children of Israel are accused not of shedding blood, nor of idolatry, nor of immoral conduct, nor of violating Thy laws; they are accused merely of faithfully observing the laws of Thy Torah."

In reply to the plea of Michael, God addressed Himself to Haman: "Thou villain! Thou didst well to enumerate the Festivals of My people, but thou didst fail to mention two new Festivals that are soon to be added to the list—Purim and Shushan Purim."

5. *Ahasuerus Consents*

"I, too, hate the Jews, and would like to destroy them," said the king, "but I fear their God, lest He punish me as He has punished other kings for plotting evil against the Jews."

"O mighty king, you have no cause to fear their God," said Haman, "for He is now old and powerless."

"Call together a council of the wise men of all

nations and tongues," said the king, "and let them tell whether it is advisable to destroy the Jews."

When the wise men of all nations and tongues were called together, they inquired: "O mighty king, who is he that desires to induce you to take so fatal a step? Pharaoh, Amalek, Sisera and others have suffered defeat and have endured frightful sufferings because they mistreated the Israelites. Why should you, O king, make so dangerous an attempt?"

"The God who drowned Pharaoh and who punished the others you have mentioned," said Haman, "is old and feeble now. He can no longer see nor can He protect his people. He is unable to care for His people Israel. For did not Nebuchadnezzar destroy His house, burn His palace, and scatter His people to all corners of the earth? Why did He not interfere with Nebuchadnezzar? Is this not the best proof that He is too old and feeble?"

Encouraged by the silence of the wise men, Haman continued: "If the king's treasury will suffer any loss by the annihilation of all the Jews, I am ready to contribute to the king's treasury ten thousand hundredweights of silver to make up for the loss."

"Haman is certainly loyal to me," thought the king. "He is convinced that the Jews are a menace to my peace, and he is ready to give a large sum of money to rid the land of them." Address-

ing Haman, he said: "Keep the money for yourself, and as far as the Jews are concerned you may deal with them as you see fit. Here is my signet ring, and you may issue any decree you please."

Haman immediately called together the king's scribes, and ordered them to send out a decree in the name of the king, which read:

"From Ahasuerus the Great, to all the peoples, nations and races, greetings of peace. In the assembly of all the rulers of the provinces, the princes of the king, the chiefs and the lords, the eastern kings and the satraps, Haman, the great officer of the king, his second in rank, the first among the grandees, one of the seven princes, and the most distinguished among the nobles of the realm, has reported to me as follows:

" 'In our domain there dwells a people scattered throughout our provinces, whose laws differ from our laws, and who are the most despicable of all nations and races. They claim that their God is the King of the world for ever and ever, and that He will cause the heathen to perish.

" 'They have been an ungrateful people from the beginning of all time. When a famine broke out in the land of Canaan, their ancestor, Jacob, came with a handful of men to Pharaoh, king of Egypt. This good king received the newcomers with great kindness, gave up to them the best of his land, and provided them with food and all they needed. Unmindful of the good done them

by the Egyptian king, they approached him one day, and said to him: "We wish to go to the wilderness, which is a three days' journey from here, to offer sacrifices to our God, and now we beg of you to lend us vessels of silver and gold, and apparel." They loaded their camels with so much wealth that Egypt was emptied of her treasures. When the three days had passed, Pharaoh pursued them to recover the stolen treasures. But what happened? The Jews had among them a great magician, Moses, who had been reared in the court of the king. Moses raised his magic staff and cleft the waters of the Red Sea. The Jews crossed the sea in safety, while Pharaoh and his army were drowned.

" 'When they marched through the wilderness, they fought the Amalekites, a mighty army of trained warriors, and vanquished them. They killed Balaam, the only prophet we heathens have ever had. They destroyed the mighty kings Sihon and Og, and took possession of their lands. They then crossed the Jordan, and, under the leadership of Joshua, they destroyed the thirty-one kings of Canaan and took away their land. Then Saul their first king completely destroyed the Amalekites, sparing no one, not even infants and women. This king was then succeeded by a ruthless king, David by name, who smote the Philistines, the Moabites and the Ammonites. David's son, Solomon, who was extremely wise, built a Temple in

Jerusalem to their God. There they prayed that they might be victorious over the heathen. But after that they sinned against their God, and He delivered them into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, who exiled them to Babylon.

" 'To this day, they are among us, and, though they are under our rule, they refuse to submit to our authority. They accept neither the religion nor the laws of any nation. Their sons do not marry our daughters; they do not worship our gods; they have no regard for our honor, and they refuse to bend the knee before our nobles and grandees. They still consider themselves free men, and hope that in the near future their God will have compassion upon them, destroy us, and bring them back to their own land.'

"This is Haman's accusation, and it is based upon facts which cannot be denied. Therefore I have summoned all the grandees, the princes, and the satraps of the realm, and, after taking counsel together, we have decided to issue a royal decree, which, in accordance with the laws of Persia and Media, is irrevocable, to destroy all the Jews and wipe out the very memory of them from the face of the earth. Accordingly, I hereby command my subjects in each and every one of the hundred and twenty-seven provinces of my empire to kill the Jews, their sons, their wives and little children on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar, so that

this wicked people may all perish in one day. Their possessions are to be distributed among the subjects who are loyal to me and who execute my order."

6. *The Heavenly Decree Sealed*

Satan noticed that the Jews were about to repent of their sins and thus avert the impending calamity. He therefore appeared before the throne of Divine Majesty, and said: "Master of the universe! Heed not the supplications and the prayers of the sons of Israel, for it is not because they fear Thee that they now repent, but because they fear the wrath of Haman. Forty-eight prophets and seven prophetesses hast Thou, O Lord, sent to them to make them forsake their evil ways. The prophets warned them day and night of the evil which would befall them, but they paid no attention to the words of the prophets. But, as soon as it becomes known to them that a mortal king, Ahasuerus, has decreed their destruction, they arise as one man to supplicate Thee. Wilt Thou indeed forgive them this time, too, and not punish them for the crime they committed by attending the banquet prepared by Ahasuerus? Disregarding the plea of Mordecai, eight hundred thousand, five hundred and forty-four of them became the guests of the king, and they ate and drank there and committed every folly."

"Should I annihilate the Jews as thou dost request," said God, "who will keep My Law?"

"O Lord, the heavens, the earth and all the angels sing Thy praises day and night," said Satan. "Does not that suffice Thee, and art Thou in need of the praises of a stubborn, sinful people?"

"Go, fetch Me writing materials wherewith I may seal the doom of My people," said God to Satan. "Get Me blood that has been shed by highwaymen among My people; I will dip My seal in it, and stamp the decree of destruction with it."

Highly elated, Satan left the presence of God. He flew from one end of the earth to the other looking for the blood of victims of Jewish lawlessness. But to his great disappointment, he could find no trace of such blood. He then returned to heaven and said: "O Lord, I was unable to find the kind of blood Thou desirest. The sons of Thy people are cowards, and therefore fear to shed blood.

"Go then and fetch Me clay," said God to Satan, "and with it will I seal the decree."

Satan flew to his archives and there he found a piece of clay which was moist with the tears of a widow. The tears had been shed by the widow when she was robbed of her property by a wicked Jew. Satan rejoiced upon finding this piece of clay, and he immediately flew to heaven with it.

"Is there much more of this kind of clay left in

thy archives?" asked God when Satan brought the clay.

"O Lord, there is nothing left of its kind in my archives," answered Satan; "this is the only piece."

God took the clay, and with it sealed the decree of the destruction of His people.

When the Torah heard that the designs of Satan against the Jews had succeeded, she donned her mourning garb, and broke out into bitter weeping before God. Her lamentations pierced the heavens and awakened the angels. They, too, began to wail, saying: "If Israel is destroyed, of what avail is the existence of the whole world? Destroy us as well."

The sun and moon heard the lamentations of the angels, and they, too, donned mourning garbs and wailed bitterly, saying: "Israel suffers at the hands of the heathen only because he observes the Torah and the commandments. Should he then be destroyed?"

The weeping of the Torah, the angels, the sun and the moon reached the prophet Elijah. In great haste, he ran to the patriarchs and to the other prophets, and addressed these words to them: "O ye fathers of the world! The Torah, the angels, the sun, the moon and the stars, the heaven and the earth are weeping bitterly. Your children are about to perish, and ye sit quietly by and stir not a finger to save them."

Thereupon the patriarchs awoke and asked: "Wherefore is God angry with our children?"

"They have sinned against Him," replied Elijah.

"If they have sinned against our Heavenly Father," replied the patriarchs, "who are we that He should annul His decree for our sake?"

The reply of the patriarchs grieved the prophet Elijah and he ran in great haste to Moses, addressing him thus: "O faithful shepherd! thy sheep have been doomed to die all in one day. Pray intercede for them before the Almighty."

"Knowest thou of any saints in the present generation of Israel?" inquired Moses of Elijah.

"I know of only one in the present generation," replied Elijah. "His name is Mordecai."

"Go then to earth," said Moses, "and let the saint of the living generation unite his prayers with the prayers of the saints among the dead, and perhaps the impending doom may be averted from Israel."

But Elijah hesitated and said: "O faithful shepherd! The doom of thy sheep is written and has been sealed by God."

"Is it sealed with blood or with clay?" asked Moses in great anxiety.

"Satan was unable to obtain blood," said Elijah, "but he procured some clay with which the decree was sealed."

"If it is sealed with clay," stated Moses, "then your prayers will be heard in heaven. Make haste,

Elijah, and communicate with the saint of the living generation."

Elijah at once flew down to earth and informed Mordecai of all that was happening on the earth below and in the heavens above.

HAMAN'S DOWNFALL

1. *Mordecai's Dream*

MEANWHILE the messengers of the king had left the court in great haste to deliver the decree throughout the provinces, and Haman, his purpose accomplished, departed with great satisfaction. He thought to himself: "My method is not like that of Esau, who desired to slay his brother Jacob but to keep his children as slaves. It is not like the plan of Pharaoh, who sought to destroy only the men of Israel, but to spare the women. Neither is it like the policy of Amalek, who pursued the Jews and smote the hindmost and the feeble, but left the strong and the brave. It is not like the method of Sennacherib, who exiled the Jews and allowed them to reside in a land as good as their own. Nor is it like the plan of Nebuchadnezzar, who carried them away into exile, and settled them near his own palace. I have seen clearly the folly of all these plans, and I have resolved to destroy them all, old and young, so that their very memory may be wiped out."

When Mordecai learned of the decree of the king, he hastened toward the court. On the way he noticed three little Jewish boys who were coming from school, and he asked the first boy:

"Pray, tell me what you have learned in school this day."

The first boy answered: "This is what I have learned to-day: " 'Be not afraid of sudden fear, neither of the desolation of the wicked when it cometh.' "

"What have you learned in school this day?" asked Mordecai of the second boy.

The second boy answered: "This is what I have learned to-day: " 'Let them take counsel together, but it shall be brought to nought; let them speak the word, but it shall not stand; for God is with us.' "

"And what have you learned this day?" asked Mordecai of the third boy.

"I, too, remember the verse I have learned to-day," replied the third boy. " 'And even to old age, I am He, and even to hoary hairs I will carry you: I have made and will bear; yea I will carry and deliver.' "

When Mordecai heard these three verses, he uttered cries of exultation and great joy, and Haman, who happened to pass by just then, asked in great astonishment: "Why this merriment?"

"These little schoolboys have announced good tidings," replied Mordecai.

"On the day of your doom," retorted Haman, "the little ones shall be the first to feel the weight of my hand."

But Mordecai did not remain idle. He called all the people together and he addressed them thus: "O people of Israel, you are dear and precious in the sight of your Heavenly Father! Know you not what has happened? Have you not heard that the king and Haman have resolved to destroy us from the face of the earth? We have no king on whom we can rely, and we have no prophet who can pray for us. There is no place under the sun to which we can flee, and there is no land where we can find safety. We are like sheep without a shepherd, like a ship upon the high seas without a pilot. We are like an infant who is born after the death of his father, and whom death soon robs also of his mother."

Mordecai then called a great prayer-meeting at the gates of the capital city Shushan. Thither they brought the Ark, containing a scroll of the Law wrapped in sackcloth. The scroll was unrolled, and they read the following verses in it: "When thou art in tribulation, and all these things are come upon thee in the latter days, thou shalt return to the Lord thy God, and hearken unto His voice, for the Lord thy God is a merciful God: He will not fail thee, neither destroy thee, not forget the covenant of thy fathers which He swore unto them."

When Mordecai saw that the people were very much touched by these verses and were ready to turn to God, he declared: "My dear brethren! You have undoubtedly heard about the prophet Jonah. God had sent this prophet to announce the destruction of the city of Nineveh. When the announcement was made by the prophet, the king of Nineveh arose from his throne, took off his crown, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. He then proclaimed, as the decree of the king and the nobles: 'Let neither man nor beast, neither herd nor flock, taste anything; let them neither eat food nor drink water, but let them be covered with sackcloth, and let them cry mightily unto God; yea, let them turn everyone from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands.' God then repented of the evil he had designed to bring upon the inhabitants of Nineveh. Now, brethren, let us follow their example, let us hold a fast and return to the Lord our God with all our hearts and souls, and He will have mercy upon us."

Mordecai, covered in sackcloth and ashes, passed through the streets of Shushan, crying bitterly over the impending doom of his brethren. Esther knew nothing of what was happening in court, and, when she was told by her faithful maidens that Mordecai had appeared at the gate of the court clothed in sackcloth and ashes, she was filled with alarm. She took new clothes, sent for

Hathach, and said to him: "Give these clothes to Mordecai and learn from him the cause of his mourning."

Mordecai refused to take the clothes offered by Hathach. "God forbid," said he to the messenger of the queen, "that I should array myself in court attire, while my people are exposed to danger. Now," continued Mordecai, "go and tell your queen that Haman, a descendant of Amalek, seeks, like his ancestor, to destroy Israel, and has succeeded in persuading the king to issue a decree throughout the empire, that all Jews, young and old, be killed on one and the same day, namely, the thirteenth day of the month of Adar.

"Now pray ask the queen to appear before the king and plead for the Jews. If she refuses to do so, please tell her of a dream I once had.

"One day I spent a long time in weeping and lamenting over the fate of my people in exile, and prayed to God to redeem Israel and rebuild the Temple. I then fell asleep, and this is the dream I had: I saw a terrible hurricane accompanied by fierce thunder and earthquake. Out of this hurricane two fearful serpents came darting forth. They engaged in a terrible combat, and all the nations of the world who were assembled there, scattered in terror. But one small despised nation was left on the scene. All the other nations sought to destroy it, and the small nation prayed to God for assistance. The fearful serpents were still

Mordecai cried bitterly over the impending doom of his brethren

engaged in their deadly struggle, and no one dared separate them. Suddenly a small fountain of water passed between the two serpents, and separated them. The little fountain rose higher and higher, and grew stronger and mightier as it rose, until it became as large as the very ocean. The clouds and darkness then vanished from the earth, and the splendor of the sun again enveloped the whole world and filled it with peace and truth.

"Tell Queen Esther that this is the same dream that I had narrated to her when she was a little girl. The two serpents are symbolic of Haman and myself, who are now engaged in a terrible struggle which concerns the lives of myriads of people. The little fountain of life represents the Almighty, and the sun radiating light is symbolic of Esther. She must therefore go and seek relief for our people."

"How can I go to the king and plead for our people?" ran the message Esther sent back to Mordecai. "You yourself advised me to keep my Jewish descent a secret. Besides, everyone of the king's subjects is familiar with the palace regulation. Any one who appears before the king without being summoned, suffers the death penalty, unless the king stretches forth his golden sceptre for the uninvited visitor to touch."

And this was Mordecai's reply to Esther: "If you neglect the opportunity to save Israel, you will have to give account for your neglect to the

heavenly court. If you were not destined to save Israel, how could your miraculous history be explained? If not through you, help will come to Israel from other quarters, for God has never forsaken His people in time of need. What cause have you to fear Haman? Does he surpass all his ancestors and predecessors who have perished in their attempt to destroy us?"

Moved by the pleas and arguments of Mordecai, Esther sent to him the following message: "I am prepared to risk my life in this world, in order to gain life in the world to come. But one request I make of you. Let the Jews of Shushan spend three days in fasting and in prayer that I may find favor in the eyes of the king."

Mordecai did as the queen had requested, and proclaimed that all the Jews in Shushan, young and old, men and women, were to pray and to fast for three days.

2. *The Prayers of Mordecai and Esther.*

All the Jews obeyed the proclamation of Mordecai, their leader, and spent three days in fasting and praying to God. Mordecai, too, fasted and prayed, and thus he appealed to God: "O Mighty King and Lord, it is revealed and known unto Thee that not because of my pride and vanity did I refuse to bow and bend the knee to Haman. It was because of my fear for Thee, and because I did not wish to give up the glory that belongs to

Thee to a mortal who will be reduced to dust and worms. Had it not been for Thy Torah and Thy commandments, O Lord, I would have consented to lick the shoes of his feet, in order to save Israel, Thy people, from the hands of their enemies. O Lord! Deliver us from the hands of Haman, and let him fall into the snare which he has laid for Thy people, so that all the peoples of the earth may know that Thy word, spoken by Moses Thy servant, is true: 'And yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break My covenant with them; for I am the Lord their God.' "

For three days Esther tasted neither food nor drink. She laid aside her crown and her royal attire, and she sat on the bare ground. At the end of the three days, she arose and made preparations to go to the king's palace. She arrayed herself in a silken garment, embroidered with gold of Ophir and spangled with diamonds and pearls sent her from Africa; a golden crown was on her head, and on her feet, shoes of gold.

After she had completed her toilet, she fervently prayed to God: "O great God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob! Not because I was without blemish did I deserve to be raised to such a high estate, but, because Thou lovest Thy people Israel, Thou gavest me grace in the eyes of the king so that Thy will might be done through me. And

now, O Lord God, let me find grace in the eyes of the king, let him hearken unto my words, and let him have compassion upon Thy people, who exclaim, 'Holy, holy, holy,' thrice daily before Thee. Save them from the hand of the king, as Thou hast saved Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah from the burning furnace, and Daniel from the den of lions.

"Hearken unto my voice, O Lord God, and see the tears Thy people are shedding, for we are delivered up to the sword for destruction. Look at the children of Thy beloved Abraham who have covered themselves with sackcloth and ashes. Though the elders have sinned, what wrongs have the children committed, and even if the children have committed wrongs, what have the sucklings done?

"O Lord, Thou didst try Abraham with ten temptations, yet didst Thou find him faithful. When Thou didst tell him to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac, he willingly did Thy bidding, nor did he delay to execute Thy command. His left hand held Isaac by the throat, and his right grasped the knife. Deliver us from the hand of the wicked Haman for his sake.

"I am ready to appear before the king and to risk my life for the sake of Thy people. Send Thou an angel of mercy with me on my errand. May the righteousness of Abraham go before me and the resignation of Isaac raise me; may the

charm of Jacob invest me, and the grace of Joseph inhabit my tongue. Let the three days we have spent in prayer and fasting remind Thee, O Lord, of the three days Abraham journeyed to bind his son upon the altar before Thee, and of the three classes of Thy people, Priests, Levites and Israelites, who stood at the foot of Sinai, and said: 'All the Lord hath spoken, will we do, and we will hearken.' "

When Esther concluded her prayer, the holy spirit enveloped her, and she felt refreshed and invigorated after her three days of fasting.

3. *Esther in the Palace*

Esther now betook herself to the king. She was accompanied by three attendants, one walking to the right of her, the second on her left, and the third bearing her train, heavy with the precious stones with which it was studded.

Esther entered the inner court of the king, and stood motionless in front of him. Ahasuerus beheld her, and he was greatly enraged at her appearance without a summons from him. Esther looked into the eyes of the king and noticed the wrath kindled there. She became greatly alarmed, and in her despair she let her head droop.

The courtiers were confident that Esther would be killed for entering the inner court without having been summoned. Already the sons of Haman

were figuring on dividing her jewels among themselves, and casting lots as to who should get her royal purple.

But God in heaven had compassion upon the helpless orphan, who, relying on Him, had risked her life for the sake of her people. God sent down three angels to help her: one enveloped her face with threads of grace, the second raised her head, and the third helped her reach the sceptre of the king. The king, enchanted by her charm, stretched forth his sceptre, and said: "My queen, why are you afraid? Woe to him who dares do you any harm. You must have a very important request to make, else you would not have risked your life. I am ready to grant it, whatever it may be, even to the half of my kingdom."

"O good king," said Esther, "all I ask is that the king and Haman attend a banquet which I propose to give."

After the banquet, the king again said to Esther: "What is your request? It shall be granted to you, even to the half of my kingdom." Then he added, jestingly: "There is but one petition I cannot grant you, and that is the rebuilding of the Temple at Jerusalem. I have given my oath to Geshem the Arabian, Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the Ammonite, not to allow it to be rebuilt, for fear the Jews may rise up against me."

"I request neither half of your kingdom, nor the

rebuilding of the Temple," replied Esther. "All I desire is that the king and Haman come again to a banquet which I propose to give to-morrow."

The king was astonished at Esther's reply, but he said nothing. He simply answered briefly: "Your request is granted."

4. *Haman Prepares a Gallows*

On leaving the palace of the queen, Haman was in the highest spirits. "The queen," thought he, "has invited none to her banquets but the king and me. She indeed esteems me above all the nobles and grandees of the empire." On his way home he saw Mordecai, dressed in sackcloth, sitting at the gates of the court, but Mordecai would not bow to him.

When Haman reached his house, he called together his three hundred and sixty-five advisers and his shrewd wife Zeresh, and he said to them: "My coffers are filled with costly treasures. I am the chief of all the nobles and the grandees. My son, Shimshai, has been appointed by the king as his secretary, and the queen invites only the king and myself to the banquets which she prepares. But all this seems worthless in my sight when I look upon Mordecai, the Jew. What I eat and drink loses its savor, if I but think of him."

"Let him then be killed at once," was the unanimous advice of the counsellors.

"Your advice is good," said Zeresh. "But have you stopped to consider how your intention can be accomplished? How will you put Mordecai to death? If you will cast him into the fire, it will have no effect upon him, for by the aid of his God, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah escaped from the burning furnace unhurt; Daniel was saved in the den of lions; Joseph was freed from prison and became the ruler in Egypt. The Jewish king, Manasseh, was placed in an iron furnace by his enemies, but he prayed to his God, and he was saved. Samson, one of their judges, did more mischief to the Philistines when he was blind than when he had his sight. My advice, therefore, is that Mordecai be hanged, for I know of no case where the God of the Jews ever saved anybody from the gallows."

Haman was very pleased with the advice of his wife, and he said: "Your words are the words of wisdom; let a gallows be prepared and completed before morning, and I will go to the king and ask for permission to hang Mordecai before the thirteenth day of Adar."

Workmen were immediately engaged to erect a gallows. While the work was in progress, Zeresh played upon the cithern, and her sons danced. When the gallows was finished Haman measured it and said: "They will do very well for the hanging of Mordecai, for he is of the same size as I am."

5. *A Night of Waking*

The night during which Haman had the gallows prepared for Mordecai, was a night of mourning and of tears. The Jews all over Persia and Media passed the night in weeping and in lamenting. "Well," said the Jews to one to another, "we thought that Esther would plead for us to the king and save us from the hands of the wicked Haman. But instead of accusing Haman before the king, she has invited him to feast with the king in her palace. Now we know that we can rely upon no one for salvation but our Lord God in heaven." So the Jews spent a sleepless night in prayer.

Esther spent the evening in preparing the banquet for the following day. She passed the night in worry, fearing lest her plan to ensnare Haman in the presence of the king might fail.

Haman, too, spent a sleepless night. He was busy supervising the work on the gallows. And when this was done to his satisfaction, he went to the Jewish house of study where he found Mordecai and thousands of Jewish children. He ordered all the children to be put in chains, declaring: "First I will hang all of these, and then I will hang Mordecai."

When the mothers heard of the evil intentions of the wicked Haman, they hastened to their children with cries and lamentations. They offered

bread and water to the little ones, saying: "You have tasted no bread and have drunk no water for days, now you must take something before you encounter death."

The children laid their hands on their books, and said: "As our teacher Mordecai lives, we shall neither eat nor drink, but we will perish exhausted by our fasting."

They rolled up the sacred scrolls, and handed them to their teachers, with the words: "As a reward for our devotion to the study of the Torah, we thought we should live long, according to the promise made in the Torah. Since we have found no favor in the eyes of God, remove the books!"

Thereupon children, teachers, mothers and fathers, all burst into loud lamentations. Their cries pierced the very heavens and reached God. The angels presented themselves before the Almighty, and said: "O Master of the universe, we hear the voice of tender lambs and sheep."

Then Moses hurried into the presence of God and said: "O merciful God, Thou knowest well that the voices are not of lambs and of sheep, but of the young of Israel, who for three days have been fasting, and now are languishing in fetters. To-morrow these little ones will be slaughtered to the delight of the wicked Haman."

At that crucial moment, God felt compassion for the Israelites, for the sake of the innocent children. He broke the seal of the Heavenly decree against

the Jews, and the decree itself He tore to pieces. Thereupon the angels rejoiced and sang hymns of praise to the Lord, saying: "Praise ye the Lord, for He is good, and His mercy endureth forever."

Ahasuerus, too, was unable to sleep that night. "What reason does Esther have to invite Haman to every banquet she prepares?" thought the king. "It must be that they are plotting to kill me so that Haman might succeed me to the throne." All at once the king began to feel pains all over his body, and he thought that he had been poisoned. He immediately ordered all those who had charge of the preparation of his food to be hanged.

"O mighty king," pleaded the accused, "we are innocent. Why, Esther and Haman partook of the same food this evening, yet they feel no unpleasant effects."

Thereupon the king pardoned the cooks and the bakers, but again a suspicion began to form in his mind that his queen and Haman were conspiring to put him out of the way. "But," argued the restless king, "if such a conspiracy really existed against me, would not my friends warn me? Is it possible, then, that I have no friends? Is it possible that I have lost their friendship? Perhaps I have failed to reward them for their valuable services."

Thereupon the king ordered the chronicles to be brought to him. In the chronicles all memorable events were recorded. Shimshai, Haman's

son, brought the chronicles, and read out of them to the king. Finally, he reached the place where the incident of the saving of the king's life by Mordecai was recorded. Shimshai desired to skip the page, and read some other part. But to his great amazement, the words made themselves audible, although they were not read by him. The king could hear them plainly: "Mordecai, the Israelite, once saved the king's life, by disclosing the conspiracy of Bigthan and Teresh against the king."

"Was nothing done to reward the faithful Mordecai?" inquired the king of his chamberlains.

"No, nothing was done," was the reply.

6. *Haman Humiliated*

The names of Mordecai and Israel had a soothing effect upon the king, and he fell asleep. In his sleep, he dreamt that Haman, sword in hand, was approaching him with intent to kill him . The king awoke, and just at that moment he beheld Haman, who had not been announced, entering the antechamber. Haman had come to obtain the king's permission to hang Mordecai on the gallows he had prepared.

"Let Haman enter my chamber," ordered the king. When Haman entered, the king said: "Your advice, Haman, always proves to be wise and good. Now tell me how I can reward the man whom I delight to honor."

"Who can be the man the king delights to honor, if not I?" thought Haman. "For I am the chief of all grandees, nobles and satraps." Then, addressing the king, he said: "The favored person whom it is your delight to honor should be arrayed in the king's coronation garments, and the royal crown should be put upon his head. Let him ride on the horse upon which the king himself rode on the day of his coronation. Let one of the grandees of the kingdom run before him, as a herald, and proclaim: 'This is the man whom the king delights to honor.' "

At the mention of the word "crown" the king's countenance changed color, for he recalled the dream about Haman from which he had just awakened. Haman noticed the change in the countenance of the king, and he took care not to mention the word "crown" again.

"Well," said the king to Haman; "your advice is very good. Now hasten to the royal treasure chambers, and fetch from there the following things: A cover of fine purple, a garment of delicate silk, bestrewn with diamonds and pearls and furnished with golden bells, the large golden crown which was brought to me from Macedonia on the day that I ascended the throne, the sword and the coat of mail that were sent me from Ethiopia, and the two veils embroidered with pearls which were sent me as gifts from Africa. Then go to the royal stables, and lead forth the black horse

on which I rode at my coronation, and with all these, seek out Morcedai, for he is the one whom I delight to honor."

Stupefied and alarmed, Haman inquired in a trembling voice: "Which Mordecai shall I seek? There are many men by that name in the realm of the king."

"Mordecai, the Jew," replied the king.

"There are many Jews named Mordecai," said Haman.

"The Jew, Mordecai, who sits in the king's gate," replied the king.

"But there are many royal gates," said Haman, "and I do not know of which one you speak."

"The gate that leads from the harem to the palace," specified the king.

"This man is my enemy and the enemy of my house," Haman pleaded with the king. "I would rather give him ten thousand talents of silver than do him this honor."

"Ten thousand talents of silver shall be given him," stated the king, "but these honors, too, you must show him."

"I have ten sons," pleaded Haman. "I would rather have them run before the king's horses than do Mordecai this honor myself."

"You, your sons and your wife shall be slaves to Mordecai," commanded the impatient king, "but these honors you must show him."

"O my lord and king," pleaded the grief-

stricken Haman, "Mordecai is a common man, and he will not appreciate these honors. Appoint him ruler over a city, or even over a district, rather than that I should do him these honors."

"I will appoint him ruler over cities and over districts," replied the somewhat infuriated king, "but these honors you must show him."

"O good lord and king," pleaded Haman again, "pray be not angry at me. You appointed me chief of all the grandees, nobles and satraps of all your provinces. Now remove me from that high office, and let me be replaced by Mordecai, but spare me the humiliation of doing him these honors."

"The man who saved the life of the king," said the king, "deserves to be the chief of my grandees, nobles and satraps, but these honors must you show him."

"O mighty king, edicts and writings have been issued to all parts of the kingdom, commanding that the nation to which Mordecai belongs shall be destroyed," pleaded Haman. "Recall these edicts and writings rather than that I should do him this honor."

"These edicts and writings shall be recalled," said the angry king, "but this honor must you do him. Now speak no further about the matter, go and execute the will of your king." And turning to Harbonah and Abzur, the king said: "Go you with Haman and take heed that he carries out my wish to the letter."

Haman went to the royal treasure chambers, walking with head bowed, his eyes dim, and his knees knocking against each other. He gathered together the royal insignia, then went to the royal stables and fetched the black horse. With all these, he went to Mordecai who was, then, in the house of study surrounded by his thousands of pupils.

When Mordecai saw Haman approaching, he thought that his last moment had come, and he said to his pupils: "The fetters put on you are much larger than your feet. You can slip out of them and run for your lives, for your enemy is approaching."

"We will not flee," answered all the pupils as one man; "you have been our teacher and guide; in life and in death we desire to be with you."

Mordecai was deeply moved by the answer of his pupils, and he said to them weepingly: "Now let us spend our last moments in prayer to God." With prayers on their lips the pupils embraced one another and they were ready to meet death by the hand of Haman.

When Mordecai had finished his prayer, Haman stepped up to him and said: "Arise, you pious son of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Your sackcloth and ashes availed more than the ten thousands talents of silver which I promised to the king. My talents were not accepted, but your prayers were accepted by your Father in heaven."

"O you wicked Haman," said Mordecai, "does it not suffice you to take my life that you have also come to mock me in my last moments on earth?"

"I have come not to mock you," said the dejected Haman; "here is the royal apparel with which the king has ordered that I array you."

When Haman began to array Mordecai in the king's raiment, Mordecai said: "For three days I have been fasting and have been dressed in sackcloth and ashes. It is unbecoming that I should put on royal apparel in such condition. I cannot put them on before I have bathed and dressed my hair, for I would be insulting the king."

Haman went out to look for a bathkeeper, but there was none to be found. He searched for a barber, but he was unable to find one, for Esther, the queen, had issued an order that bathkeepers and barbers were not to ply their trade on that day. Haman feared to delay the execution of the king's command any longer, for he was watched by the king's courtiers, Harbonah and Abzur. There was nothing for Haman to do but perform, himself, the services Mordecai required. He took a towel, soap and a pair of scissors, he washed Mordecai, and trimmed and combed his hair.

Haman tried to play upon Mordecai's feelings, and, heaving a deep sigh, he said: "The greatest in the king's realm is now acting as bathkeeper

and barber!" But Mordecai remained unmoved by the words of Haman, for he well knew that Haman in his younger days had been the barber of Karzum.

Haman then arrayed Mordecai in the king's robes, put the golden crown upon his head, and requested him to mount the king's black horse. But Mordecai, exhausted by the three days of fasting, was unable to mount the horse unaided, and Haman had to serve him as a footstool.

As soon as Mordecai mounted the king's horse, twenty-seven thousand youths were detailed by the king to march in front of Mordecai. Every one of these youths bore a golden cup in his right hand and a golden beaker in his left.

Finally, Haman took the bridle of the royal horse, led it through the streets of the city, and he together with the twenty-seven thousand youths proclaimed: "Thus shall be done unto the man whom the king delights to honor."

While thus riding in regal state, Mordecai felt no pride, but praised the Lord God with these words: "I will extol Thee, O Lord, for Thou hast raised me up, and hast not made my foes to rejoice over me." Thereupon his pupils joined in with the words: "Sing praise unto the Lord, O you saints of His, and give thanks to His holy name. For his anger is but for a moment; in His favor is life; weeping may tarry for the night, but joy

cometh in the morning." When Esther looked through the window and noticed in amazement what was going on, she said: "I cried to Thee, O Lord; and unto the Lord I made supplication. What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the pit? Shall the dust praise Thee? Shall it declare Thy truth?" And the multitude of Jewish onlookers said: "Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity, for the Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping. The Lord hath heard my supplication."

All this time, the daughter of Haman was standing on the roof of the house in order to witness the hanging of Mordecai. When she heard the noise of the great multitude assembled in the streets, she thought that the people had gathered for the same purpose. Seeing a man mounted on the king's horse and arrayed in royal apparel, she said to herself: "Surely it must be my father riding on the horse, and the accursed Mordecai leading the horse by the bridle." Raising a vessel filled with slop, she emptied it upon the head of the leader—her own father. When she realized her error, she threw herself down from the roof, and was crushed to death on the street below.

7. *Haman's End*

In spite of the sudden change in his fortunes, Mordecai ended the day in praying and fasting,

as he had begun it. When the procession was over, he took off the royal garments, and again covered himself with sackcloth and prayed till nightfall.

Dejected and humiliated beyond description, Haman returned home. He again summoned his three hundred and sixty-five advisers and his wife, and told them of his sad fortunes. None of the councillors dared speak to Haman in his distress, and neither could Zeresh, his wife, find words of consolation for him. For she said: "If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall is of the seed of the Jews, you shall not prevail against him, but shall surely fall before him."

"Why did you advise me to make a gallows for Mordecai?" asked Haman, "if you knew that no one could prevail against the children of Israel?"

"Their God has compared them at times to the dust upon the ground, and at other times He has compared them to the stars in heaven," said Zeresh. "When they fall low they fall as low as the dust on the ground, but when they rise, they rise as high as the stars in the heavens. At first, when I saw Mordecai fall low, I thought he would fall still lower. Now that he is beginning to rise, I know that he will continue to rise to the very heavens."

While they were talking, the king's chamberlains came in and said: "By the order of the king and the request of the queen, you are to come with us immediately to the banquet the queen has pre-

pared." And Haman, at once, set out with them to the palace of the queen.

In the midst of the feast, Ahasuerus again said to the queen: "What is your desire? It shall be granted to you even to the half of my kingdom."

Thereupon Esther, casting her eyes heavenward, spoke as follows: "If I have found favor in Thy sight, O King, and if it please Thee, O King of the world, let my life be given me, and let my people be rescued from the hands of its enemy."

Ahasuerus, thinking that Esther was addressing these words to him, asked in irritation: "Who is he, and where is he, who intends to do you harm?"

Esther, pointing toward Haman, said: "This is the man who sought to harm us, who desired to array himself in the royal garments, ride upon your horse, and wear your golden crown upon his head—this wicked and heartless Haman."

"Haman is a conspirator," cried out the infuriated king. "Come, then, and pronounce judgment upon him."

When Harbonah heard the king's angry exclamation, he said to Ahasuerus: "Nor is this the only crime Haman has committed against the king. He hatched a conspiracy against you together with Bigthan and Teresh, and his hatred toward Mordecai dates back to the time when Mordecai uncovered the foul plot. Out of revenge, Haman has erected a gallows in his yard upon which to hang Mordecai."

Thereupon the king exclaimed angrily: "Let Haman be hanged on the very gallows which he has prepared for Mordecai!" He at once sent for Mordecai, and said: "Now, Mordecai, I charge you with the execution of the royal order that Haman be hanged on the very gallows which he had prepared for you."

Mordecai hastily carried Haman off to the gallows. Haman on the way, pleaded, shedding bitter tears: "Pray, Mordecai, bear no grudge against me, and do not suffer me to perish by hanging, a death which the commonest of criminals meet. Execute me with the sword, and let me die as a man of rank who is guilty of a serious offense. It was really not I who thought of the idea of hanging you on the gallows. It was the advice of my wife and my counsellors."

"God forbid that I should bear a grudge against you," said Mordecai. "I sought to do you no harm, nor did I request the king to hang you on the gallows which you had prepared for me. But I have been charged by the king with the execution of his order, and you well know that no one dare change aught thereof."

By the order of the king, not only Haman, but also his ten sons were hanged on the gallows.

8. *The Second Edict of the King*

The king's fury subsided after Haman and his ten sons had been hanged. He now took the signet

ring which he had removed from Haman's finger, and, giving it to Mordecai, said: "Here is my signet ring. I appoint you in the place and in the stead of Haman, and you may now issue any decree, and sign it with the royal seal."

Mordecai thereupon wrote the following edict in the name of Ahasuerus:

"King Ahasuerus sends this letter to all grandees, nobles, and satraps, and to all the inhabitants on water and land; may your peace be great. Haman, the son of Hammedatha, who was close to the king and into whose hands the government was entrusted, did, by his intrigues and falsehoods, mislead the king, and wrote letters that all the Jews of the realm be killed on one day. It was my impression that Haman had the welfare of his country at heart, and therefore I consented to his petition. But now I have ascertained that this man who came to us and enjoyed our kindness, praise and dignity, was full of intrigues, harbored thoughts of killing the king and of taking away his kingdom. With his own selfish motive in view, he persuaded me to order righteous men to be killed and innocent blood to be shed. Therefore, I have ordered the son of Hammedatha to be hanged on the gallows which he had prepared for Mordecai, who once had saved my life from the plots of conspirators. Now, Queen Esther, for whose sake I have distributed many gifts and on whose account I have granted many concessions to my subjects, is

a cousin of this wise, honest man, Mordecai. I therefore rescind the edict decreeing the death of the Jews, and hereby desire my subjects to honor and befriend the children of Israel."

(*Continued from front flap*)

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